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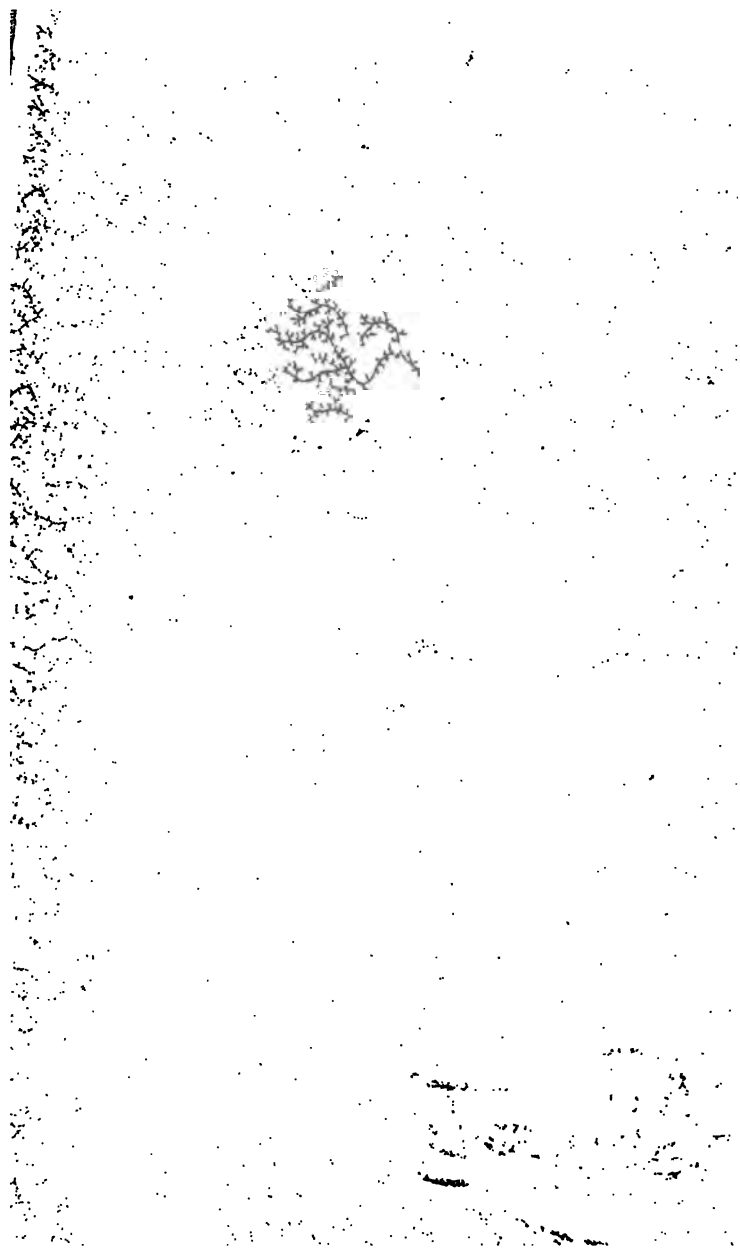
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"RAN THEM THROUGH WITH HIS SWORD"

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The Passing of
THOMAS

In the St. Peter's
Set
At the Grand
Hôtel du Paradis
The Fish of
Monsieur Quissard
Le Bon Oncle
d'Amérique



Five Stories by

**Thomas A.
Janvier**

Author of

"The Uncle of an Angel"
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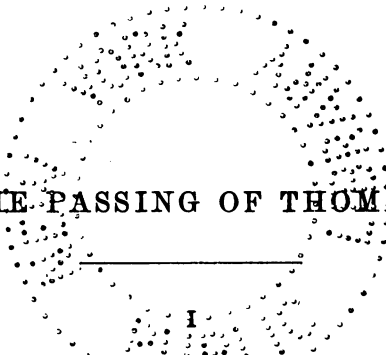
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THE PASSING OF THOMAS





THE PASSING OF THOMAS

ALTHOUGH by profession a stock-broker, Mr. Harver was a man of humane and even amiable disposition. Excepting in a business way, he was very loath to cause pain to any of his fellow-creatures; and a like kindliness was manifested to a marked degree in his treatment of the lower orders of animals. Even when it came to that portion of the insect world in dealing with which mankind is accustomed to employ tongs and poisonous solutions and destructive powders, Mr. Harver still exhibited his natural goodness of heart by using these exterminating agents with a benevolent firmness. The obnoxious insect entities were bereft of life, but with that maximum of celerity which assured a minimum of pain. Had Mr. Harver been a tyrant—using the word in its older and better sense—he would have been first among tyrants to employ electricity in the execution of criminals; and if science had revealed any more genial means of getting rid of criminals—that is to

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say, any means quicker and less painful than electricity—he would have adopted it instantly. At times he regretted keenly that his station in life had not been that of a tyrant. Occupying such a position—aside from the obvious advantage that it would have given him in regard to manipulating the stock market by means of Edicts—he could have made effective many improved theories of government which he had himself devised, or which he had read about in the course of his quite extensive study of the works of political economists. One of the reforms which he most earnestly longed to realize was the adoption of a system of rational philanthropy in accordance with which all malformed and constitutionally weakly persons—and of course all imbeciles, hopeless lunatics, and hereditary criminals—would be eliminated from the physically and morally sound portion of humanity by the least painful and most expeditious method that could be employed.

Being a person of this practically and resolutely benevolent sort, Mr. Harver's disposition was to offer to Thomas the choice, as it were, between bowls and bowstrings the very moment that Thomas, being then advanced to a great age, began to go blind. Owing to the entreaties of Mrs. Harver—who was not a student of political economy, and who was devotedly attached to Thomas—he consented to hold the decree of death in abeyance for a season, and even permitted Mrs. Harver to consult an oculist. But when the oculist had certified

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to the impossibility of a cure, and when Thomas's blindness had so increased that he could not walk across the room without bumping into chairs and tables, even Mrs. Harver admitted that the kindest thing to do to him would be to give him release from his affliction in death. And then Mr. Harver, in his practically kind-hearted way, said that there should be no bungling about it; that he himself would take Thomas down cellar and give him an overdose of ether on a sponge.

When Mrs. Harver held Thomas for the last time in her arms that fatal evening—the execution took place in the evening because Mr. Harver then had ample time to attend to it—her feelings entirely overcame her. Thomas's disposition was most affectionate. On this painful occasion he turned tenderly toward her his poor blind eyes; he pushed his soft little paws alternately against her arm so vigorously as to set to tinkling the silver bell that he wore about his neck; and with all the strength that remained in his aged body he purred forth his love. The situation was heart-breaking. Even Mr. Harver, as he gently unclasped Mrs. Harver's arms from about Thomas, and gently enfolded him in his own, had such a lump in his throat that his words of attempted consolation were spoken with difficulty; and his emotion so overcame him that he was near to missing his footing and tumbling down the whole length of the cellar stairs. As for Mrs. Harver, when Thomas fairly was taken from her, she collapsed completely and fell upon a sofa

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in an agony of tears. From the days of his very earliest kittenhood she had loved Thomas tenderly, and through all the fifteen years of their affectionate companionship her love for him steadily had increased. It was a most bitter blow that their parting had come at last, and in what seemed to be so cruel a way.

Half an hour or so later, Mr. Harver—bringing with him the odor of a dentist's office—returned to the library. Cobwebs stuck about him in various places, he was very pale, and beads of sweat stood thickly upon his brow. For a while he did not trust himself to speak: he simply sat down by Mrs. Harver's side and enfolded her in his arms. The silence was broken only by the sound of Mrs. Harver's sobs.

That both Mr. and Mrs. Harver should manifest such strong feeling was not, under the circumstances, at all surprising. They were without children, and for many years Thomas had filled the place of a child in their hearts and in their home. In his prime he had been one of the largest and finest Maltese cats ever seen in the city of Philadelphia (which city is famous for its Maltese cats of great size), and his moral and intellectual perfections had been in keeping with his physical beauty. Having been taken early in life and carefully educated, he had been trained to be a trick cat of rare parts; and his sweetness of temper was such that he always manifested a real pleasure in showing off his series of polite accomplishments. It had been

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his custom at meals, save on formal occasions, to sit beside Mrs. Harver on a high chair, eating with a decorous propriety from a small plate, and manifesting so keen a sense of the requirements of table etiquette that he never would begin his repast until his bib had been tied on. At night, the little silver bell about his neck tinkling to the time of his footsteps, it was his custom to precede Mr. and Mrs. Harver from the library—in which apartment their evenings usually were passed—to their bedchamber. With the utmost gravity he would walk up the stairs just in front of them; would bid them good-night by putting out his paws to be shaken; and then, of his own accord, would go to the basket in Mr. Harver's dressing-room in which he slept; and in the morning, at the very first sound of stirring in their apartment, he would come trotting in from the dressing-room, and would bid them good-day with a purr so shaking and gurgling as to bid fair to choke him. Being a cat of this most unusual sort, his loss, it will be perceived, was nothing short of a domestic calamity.

When the first violent outburst of their grief had passed and they had grown somewhat calmer, Mr. and Mrs. Harver talked for a while tenderly and lovingly about the late Thomas—his name never had been abbreviated either in addressing him or in speaking of him—and found a certain amount of sad comfort in recalling to each other's minds his many excellencies. From this they passed on to consideration of what disposition should be made

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of his remains. Mr. Harver, in his practical way, suggested the dustman; but Mrs. Harver would not hear of the dustman.

"How can you think of such a thing?" she asked with energy. "It is cruel. Thomas is much better entitled to a lot in Laurel Hill than a good many people who have one. He must be buried fittingly."

"Very well," said Mr. Harver; "let us bury him in the back-yard."

"No," Mrs. Harver answered; "it would be painful to have him buried there; and it also would be an insult to his memory. Thomas never was a back-yard cat. That will not do at all."

"In the cellar, then," Mr. Harver suggested, but hesitatingly.

"Impossible!" replied Mrs. Harver. "It would be horrible to have him right under us, that way—and I am sure that if we buried him in the cellar his dear little ghost would haunt the house. No; I tell you what we'll do: we'll take him out to Germantown and bury him in John's garden. Any cat would be glad to be buried in that beautiful garden; and I'm sure that John will let us put up a little stone with Thomas's name on it, and how old he was, and how through the whole of his life he was the very best cat that ever lived. Yes, that is the best thing that possibly can be done. Come home early from the office, and we'll do it to-morrow afternoon."

"You forget. To-morrow I am going to New

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York; and if the syndicate people make another mess of it, as they probably will, I shall be detained through the evening, and will have to come home on the midnight train. There's a special meeting of the Girard directors on Thursday morning at 9.30, or I would stay all night."

Mrs. Harver was silent for a moment. When she spoke it was in firm tones. "I will take dear Thomas out myself," she said. "To-morrow morning, before you go down-town, you can put him in the old silver-basket—now that we have the silver-safe in the pantry we no longer need it, and it still is a very respectable-looking basket to carry about—and I will put a napkin on top to make it look like something that I am carrying to a sick friend. It will be a rather conspicuously large basket to carry through the streets, I know; but if people think anything about it at all, they only will think that it is very kind-hearted of me to take so much trouble. Don't you think that that is a very good plan, dear?"

Mr. Harver was not disposed to yield an unqualified assent to this project; but he ended by admitting that this was about the only way by which Mrs. Harver's amiable wishes in regard to the entombment of Thomas in her brother John's garden could be realized. And then, the matter being thus settled, they went up-stairs together for the night.

It was a very dismal progress. No little gray figure trotted up the stairs ahead of them; there

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was no tinkling of a little silver bell ; no little paws were extended to bid them good-night. Mrs. Harver broke down again completely. Mr. Harver had to give her ignatia before she could get to sleep.

II

The next day, after lunch, Mrs. Harver set out upon her sorrowful journey to Germantown. Being a person of exceptionally pleasing appearance, and being always very well dressed, she was accustomed when she fared abroad to having people turn around and look at her ; but she was not accustomed to being stared at as vigorously as she was stared at on this particular day.

That she should be an object of lively interest every one who beheld her was not, on the whole, surprising. She was a little woman, and the old silver-basket which served for Thomas's catafalque was large. Moreover, there was a great deal of Thomas inside of it. One of their pet names for him (suggested by a naval relative) had been "The Eighteen-pounder"; which name had been justified by the actual facts. To carry eighteen pounds of dead cat in a large basket required more bodily strength, Mrs. Harver discovered, than she had readily at her disposal. Undeniably, the sight of this very small, very pretty, and very well-dressed woman struggling with her load was quite enough to make people stare—and they did ! If the inter-

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ested observers of her far from triumphal progress entertained the thought that she was carrying food to a sick friend, some difficulty must have been experienced in reconciling the quantity of food carried with the appetite of any known variety of invalid.

Fortunately, Mrs. Harver had but half a square to walk in order to reach a street-car. That distance was quite enough for her. When she got to the corner her arms were very tired and her face was very red. She was beginning to think that the contract which she had taken was a dangerously large one. For years she had been exceedingly proud of Thomas's unusual size. Her feeling now was that for mortuary purposes a much smaller cat would have been more desirable. And she regretted keenly that the little silver bell which for so many years had tinkled in unison to Thomas's footsteps had not been removed from his neck as a preliminary to his sepulture. Her regret was not lessened by the fact that it had been left in place at her particular request. As she walked along it did jingle dreadfully !

When she boarded the street-car the conductor took her basket from her and carried it to the front end. "Right up here, ma'am, out of the way," he said. He evidently was surprised by the jingling inside of the basket, and this queer little noise obviously aroused the interest of the passengers. Mrs. Harver felt that she was flushing desperately. It was very trying to be so persistently

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stared at. Moreover, the conductor's words, and his disposition of her property, made her feel as though she were a washer-woman taking home clean clothes. The appearance of the basket certainly tended to foster this belief. Mr. Harver had removed its central division and had stowed Thomas in it lengthwise, steadying him all around and covering him with wads of newspaper. Over this humpy surface—to give color to the food-for-a-sick-friend theory—a large napkin had been spread and had been tucked in snugly at the sides and ends. With the washer-woman possibilities of the situation so pointedly suggested to her, it seemed quite impossible that anybody would entertain the sick-friend postulate for a moment. Her one sustaining consolation was the absolute correctness of her attire. Washer-women, she reflected, were not in the habit of wearing tailor-made gowns; nor did their gowns, hats, gloves, and fans, as a rule, belong to one harmonious scheme of color. Her gown was tailor-made, and her color effect was irreproachable.

Up at the forward end of the car the air was somewhat heavy; and it was made heavier by a curious odor which Mrs. Harver did not at first recognize, but which aroused in her mind a chain of uneasy thoughts vaguely associated with pain. Presently she perceived that the people about her perceptibly were sniffing; and then she heard some one say: "What a horrid smell of ether!"

These words went through Mrs. Harver like a

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knife. She started violently, and she knew by the way her face burned that she must be quite crimson. During the remaining ten minutes that she was in the car she sat rigidly, her face averted from her fellow-passengers, gazing out of the front window. She did not see anything clearly. The backs of the horses seemed to be bobbing about in a curious mist.

As she left the car she knew that everybody was staring at her; she knew that everybody sniffed suspiciously as the conductor carried out her jingling basket, and she was conscious of a most unpleasant whispering behind her as she followed it. She had expected to take another car. Fortunately an empty hansom was passing. She hailed it, lifted the basket into it with some difficulty, and drove directly to the station.

A porter took her basket, carried it through the waiting-room, and put it aboard the train. She observed that the porter bent down over the basket and smelled at it in a manner that betokened curiosity and surprise. That his curiosity was stimulated, rather than allayed, when she gave him a half-dollar for his trifling service was obvious. He looked at her for a moment searchingly as he received this gift, but he did not speak. He was a loyal porter. Believing that he had been paid to keep silence, he kept it. At the door of the car he turned and shot another penetrating look at her. As he passed down the platform he paused before the window beside which she was seated and

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looked at her again. While this inquisition was in progress Mrs. Harver had the paradoxical sensation, as she subsequently expressed it, of being detected in the perpetration of an uncommitted crime.

As the train started she began to heave a sigh of relief—which ended abruptly in a smothered gasp of annoyance and alarm as she heard her name pronounced and, turning, beheld Mr. Hutchinson Port bowing to her. Of all the million or so of people dwelling in Philadelphia, Mr. Hutchinson Port—an elderly gentleman, of gluttonous tendencies, a bilious habit, and a most censorious disposition—was the very last whom Mrs. Harver would have desired to meet on that particular day. Rising sixty (though he did not admit it), Mr. Port was an itinerant encyclopædia of Philadelphia gossip and scandal of the preceding forty years. Moreover, his zest in adding to his stock of scandalous information was equalled only by his zeal in disseminating it; and, although normally dull and ponderous in his conversation, he manifested a considerable imaginative faculty in perverting minor lapses from social rectitude into downright social crimes, and even contrived to give to his misrepresentations of fact a humorous touch which sufficed to assure their general currency.

Being entirely familiar with these several facts, Mrs. Harver knew perfectly well that the discovery by Mr. Port of her odd venture in feline undertaking would result in the publication of the matter in such a way as to make a laughing-stock of her;

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and that she would be lucky if she got off without serious reflections being cast upon her moral character. Her promptly formed determination, therefore, was that he should *not* find out about it—even though, to compass this end, she should be compelled to shelter herself behind the fragments of the ninth commandment. She was a well-brought-up young woman, but she was of the opinion that when the suggestions of the Decalogue were at issue with the requirements of polite society the Decalogue necessarily must go under every time. Acting upon this opinion, she said with an admirable cordiality :

“I am so very sorry that I cannot offer you a share of this seat, Mr. Port. But you wouldn’t be comfortable here; my basket would crowd you. It is such a very big basket, you see.”

“It certainly is a big basket,” Mr. Port responded, looking down at it with some surprise. And then he added, with what was intended for sprightliness : “Really, Mrs. Harver, I am half disposed to believe that you contemplate turning burglar, and are getting your hand in by running away with your own plate.”

“How droll and how clever you are !” Mrs. Harver answered, with a warmly appreciative smile. “No, I am not running away with the plate; I am only taking a basket of—of jelly to Mrs. Selwyn, my sister-in-law.” And then, feeling that she was in for it, she went on : “I am rather famous for my jelly, you know.”

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It is only just to Mrs. Harver to state that upon uttering this plumper she shivered a little. Absolutely, she never had made so much as a teaspoonful of any sort of jelly in the whole course of her life. Her notions in regard to this housewifely office were to the last degree confused and vague; mere scraps of theory based upon memories of talk about jelly-making which she had happened to overhear.

Unfortunately for Mrs. Harver, Mr. Port knew a great deal about jellies; and—his keenest colloquial pleasure being the discussion of any matter relating to eating—his manner at once became attentive and grave.

“You interest me deeply,” he said, at the same time settling himself on the arm of the seat, and leaning over toward Mrs. Harver. “Jellies are one of my hobbies. May I ask of what your jelly is made? My! what a strong smell of ether!”

“Currants,” Mrs. Harver answered, promptly. She was horrified by the reference to ether, and at any cost she was determined to keep the conversation on less dangerous ground. Moreover, she knew that a jelly was made of currants: they had had some with their roast mutton only the night before.

“My interest lies chiefly in meat jellies,” Mr. Port replied, with a slight intonation of regret in his voice. “But there is much,” he went on more cheerfully, “in fruit jellies which deserves the most careful thought. It is very curious, this smell of ether. What are your proportions?”

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"Proportions?" asked Mrs. Harver, nervously. "I do not quite understand."

"I mean, how much sugar do you allow to a pint of juice? And do you dilute the juice? I hope not. Upon my soul, it smells like a hospital!"

"Oh, never!" said Mrs. Harver, with great decision—feeling quite safe in following Mr. Port's lead. She would have waited for a leader in regard to the sugar had she been calmer, but the reference to the hospital was upsetting, and she dashed ahead. "As to the sugar, I usually allow about—about two pounds to the pint. That makes it about right, don't you think?"

"Why, no," Mr. Port replied, bluntly, "I don't. It must make it ruinously sweet." And Mr. Port stared so hard at Mrs. Harver, and his expression was so peculiar, that she knew that she must have made a very bad break.

"Oh, but, you know," she went on, hurriedly, "the lemon juice corrects that. Without the lemon juice it *would* be ruinously sweet, just as you say. And more of the sweetness is counteracted, you know, by the lemon-peel and the whites of the eggs and the nutmeg." Mrs. Harver spoke now with a good deal of assurance, for she remembered that Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith had mentioned all of these things in connection with jelly only a few nights before.

Mr. Port regarded her with obvious wonder, and also with a slight air of reproachful doubt. "Really," he said, "this is quite the most extraordinary

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currant jelly that I ever heard of! And you actually mix those things together?"

"Certainly," Mrs. Harver answered. She remembered Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith's exact words, and went ahead swimmingly: "I mix them all together, and boil them gently for about five hours and a half, and then I strain them and set them away overnight in the refrigerator in a large earthen pan. You shall taste some of my jelly the very next time that you dine with us, Mr. Port."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Mr. Port, fervently, as he rose from his somewhat uncomfortable seat, straightened himself to his full height, and looked at Mrs. Harver in a manner that betokened not doubt, but grave displeasure. And then he added angrily, as his slow-moving mind arrived at what to him seemed to be the only reasonable explanation of Mrs. Harver's confusing utterances: "This is all nonsense; you are making game of me! Permit me to say that I do not find the same amusement in being rallied, and upon so serious a subject, as you evidently find in rallying me. I have the honor, madam, to wish you a very good day."

Having uttered these caustic words, Mr. Port raised his hat in a manner coldly formal, and with a severe dignity—like a very correctly dressed Lot abandoning a culinary Sodom—walked away from Mrs. Harver's contaminating presence into another car. So deeply outraged were all his finer feelings that he gladly would have walked away from her into another hemisphere.

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For some moments Mrs. Harver was at a loss to understand why she had been thus wrathfully forsaken ; and then, of a sudden, she remembered that Mrs. Rittenhouse Smith had been talking about calves'-foot jelly—and so perceived the fatal error into which she had fallen, and understood the meaning of Mr. Port's indignant words. She visibly shuddered : partly in dread of the exceedingly unpleasant things which in his justified wrath he certainly would say about her, and partly in horror of the thorough-going manner in which she had made a fool of herself. Chewing the cud of these bitter fancies was her cheerless occupation during the remainder of her short journey by rail. The silver lining to her cloud was the blessed knowledge that Mr. Port had not discovered that she was travelling in company with eighteen pounds of dead cat.

III

At the Germantown station Mrs. Harver transferred herself and her burden—the latter with difficulty—to a carriage and drove directly to the house of her brother John. The house, which stood a little back from the street, had an unusually shut-up look ; and a long time elapsed between her ring and the partial opening of the door—with the chain still up—by a very young and very dull house-maid. Through the narrow opening, from the house-maid's stand-point, the most conspicuous object in

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sight was the large basket—which Mrs. Harver, after her tussle with it up the path from the gate, very thankfully had deposited on the door-step. The girl gave one glance at the basket, said briefly, “Go ways wid ye—we don’t want any,” and began to close the door.

“Stop!” cried Mrs. Harver, at the same time pushing against the closing door. “Is Mrs. Selwyn at home?”

“Sure an’ she’s not at home,” the girl answered; and added: “An’ now yous be afther lavin’ to oncet.”

Mrs. Harver, naturally, was angry; but she was cool enough to perceive that the girl was only stupid. Therefore she pushed hard against the door, which was coming to again, and asked: “Where are your master and mistress?”

“An’ phwat is’t t’ you where they be, I’d like t’ know? But it’s t’ Cape May they’ve wint in a drivin’ hurry, along o’ th’ blessed baby bein’ took sick in th’ night.”

“Where are the other servants? There must be somebody else in the house besides you.”

“Indade an’ there ain’t, thin; an’ there don’t nade t’ be. It’s meself can take care of it an’ kape out th’ thaves. But don’t yous be afther thinkin’ I’m alone here nights,” she continued hurriedly, “for it’s a houseful there is ’f us—th’ master a-comin’ home t’ slape, an’ Robert in th’ stable, an’ cook an’ me. All th’ boorglurs in th’ wurruld couldn’t get in—an’ whin they did get in it’s shot

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dead would ivry mother's son of 'em be! An' now go away wid ye paceable, wid no more wurruds."

"Listen!" said Mrs. Harver impressively, "I am Mr. Selwyn's sister—"

"Phwat are ye afther givin' me now?" the girl cut in sharply. "'Th' master's sister, indade! An' yous wid a basket loike that!"

"I tell you," repeated Mrs. Harver, "I am Mr. Selwyn's sister, and that is the reason why I have brought this basket here. Now, what I want you to do is to take the basket and give it to Robert when he comes in, and to tell him that Mrs. Harver—he will know the name—that Mrs. Harver wants him to bury this poor little dead creature," her eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled, "down by the summer-house, beneath the large oleander. Tell him to make a pretty little grave, and to leave a place where a little tombstone— Good heavens, girl! What is the matter with you?"

The abrupt break in Mrs. Harver's address was not without ample cause. Of a sudden the housemaid's stupid face had grown pale, her eyes had enlarged prodigiously, and her whole expression betrayed great horror and alarm. With a half-gasp she cried: "Oh, you bloody murtherin' woman! Be off wid yees an' your dead baby before iver I call th' perlace!" As she uttered these words she closed the door with a bang; and before Mrs. Harver could make even an attempt to open it she heard the clatter of a bolt on the inside.

The situation was a very absurd one, Mrs. Har-

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ver decided; but it was even more annoying than it was absurd. The servant absolutely refused to open the door again; and in response to knocks only fired peremptory orders through the key-hole to depart. At the end of five minutes Mrs. Harver perceived that the wisest course open to her was to follow the advice conveyed to her through this channel in such urgent terms. Fortunately, the driver of the carriage, moved by curiosity to see what would become of his queer fare, had waited at the gate. Owing to this circumstance she was in a position to make an orderly retreat. Suddenly the happy thought occurred to her that she would hire this man to relieve her of the painful duty with which she had charged herself, but to perform which seemed to be beyond her powers. No doubt, for a dollar, he would be very glad to bury Thomas in some pleasant place; and so would she be rid of her dismal burden, and Thomas would rest in peace.

She was so full of this project that she did not perceive—when she picked up the basket and set off with it down the path to the gate—that the door was opened, and that the house-maid came out and followed her. As she approached the carriage she looked at the driver attentively, in order to form some estimate of his suitableness for the service which she desired him to perform. He did not strike her as an especially promising-looking specimen of humanity; and she was surprised by perceiving that he was looking at her quite as

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keenly as she was looking at him. Her obvious repulse from the house which she obviously desired to enter had deepened his interest in her considerably.

"You seem to be a kind man," said Mrs. Harver, thinking it well to propitiate him by attribut-



"TURRUN HER OVER T' TH' PERLACE"

ing to him virtues which she was inclined to believe he did not possess. "Will you do something for me? And, of course, I shall be very glad to pay you for your trouble. I want you to bury for me a poor little—"

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"Yous be afther kapin' your oies on that murderin' faymale!" the house-maid called out from the other side of the gate. "It's a dead baby, sure, she's got in her big basket. Turrin her over t' th' perlace!"

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Harver. "The woman's a fool. What I have in here is a poor little dead cat. I want you to bury it for me. Will you? I will pay you handsomely."

To Mrs. Harver's astonishment, and also to her indignation, the man gave her an exceedingly knowing look, and then actually winked at her.

"It's all right, ma'am," he said, in a confidential tone. "If you're willin' t' put up enough t' pay me for th' risk, I'll fix things for you—all on the quiet, and as comfortable as you please. How does a hunderd dollars strike you? That's little enough, when you remember that it's a jailin' job if I'm caught."

Mrs. Harver fairly gasped. "One hundred dollars for burying a cat! Man, you have taken leave of your senses!"

"Oh, come now, ma'am, it's all right t' *call* it a dead cat; that sounds better. But what's th' good o' tryin' t' come your dead cats on me? Ladies like you don't carry dead cats round th' country in baskets just for th' fun o' th' thing; an' they don't offer t' pay han'some for havin' 'em buried. It's too thin. You know what you've got in there; an' I know too—even if that fool of a girl wasn't a-yellin' it out loud enough for th' folks t' hear her in

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Chestnut Hill. But let all that slide, an' let's call it cats, if you want to. 'Th' nubs o' this thing is that you've got somethin' you want mighty bad t' get shut of, an' that I'm willin' t' shut you of it for a hunderd dollars. That's all there is to it—an' what I want t' know is, will you or won't you trade?"

"Drive me to the station at once," said Mrs. Harver, with great indignation. "If you dare to say another word I will call a policeman and have you arrested."

The man waited until Mrs. Harver was fairly in the carriage, the door shut, and he himself upon the box. Then he turned and answered: "Police is a game that two can play at. I'll drive you t' th' station fast enough. There's always an officer in front o' th' station. If you don't get reasonable an' agree t' trade by th' time we get there, I'll turn you over t' him—dead baby an' all!"

Being delivered of this threat, the driver whipped up his horses and the carriage rattled down the street.

Mrs. Harver's irritation was so extreme that even had opportunity been given her to reply to this insolent speech, she scarcely could have done so. Her anger fairly choked her. For a little while she was quite incapable even of coherent thought. As she drew near to the station, however, her brain cleared, and she determined upon an energetic line of action. She was quite sure that the driver was in earnest about turning her over to the police;

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and she perceived that the only way to counter was to turn herself over—that is to say, to call upon a policeman for protection. There was a strong probability, she knew, that the upshot of this move would be the parading of the whole affair in the newspapers; and before her mind floated a sickening vision of startling head-lines: “The Lady and the Dead Cat,” “Broker Harver’s Wife tries to bury her defunct Feline”—and stuff of that sort. But her strait was desperate, and desperation compelled her to go ahead. By a series of unavoidable mischances she had been, as it were, brought face to face with the devil. There was nothing for it but to fight him with fire.

The carriage stopped in front of the station. A few steps from the entrance was a policeman, who, after the manner of his kind, was swinging his club by its leather thong and looking ineffably bored. The driver got down from the box and came to the door. Leaning over it, with his hand on the knob, he asked, “Well, ma’am, is it a go?”

Mrs. Harver’s metal was up. For answer she called sharply, “Officer!” The policeman stopped swinging his club, and was at the door of the carriage in an instant.

“This man is misbehaving himself, officer,” she said. “He is either drunk or crazy. Please make him stand aside while I get out.”

The driver was not prepared for this sudden turning of his guns, but he rallied his forces

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promptly. "She's got a dead baby in her basket, she has; an' she's been offerin' me a hunderd dollars t' take 't off an' bury 't on th' quiet. So I've brought her down here so 's t' give you a chance t' run her in. See?"

"What I've got in this basket is a dead cat," said Mrs. Harver, firmly. "Shall I open the basket and show it to you?"

"I guess mebbe you'd better, ma'am," replied the policeman, whose professional instinct led him to regard all large baskets with distrust.

Mrs. Harver was painfully aware of the fact that a crowd was gathering, the members of which were staring at her over the policeman's and the driver's shoulders with a very lively curiosity. If the earth just then could have opened and swallowed her up, she would have been delighted. As cataclysmic relief of this sort was not available, she went ahead. Bending down over the basket, with trembling hands she drew back the napkin and removed the layer of newspapers. There lay Thomas, rigid, on his back, with his little gray paws crossed upon his gray breast. At sight of him she had much difficulty in keeping down a sob. Leaning forward, the policeman and the driver saw Thomas and were convinced.

"You're a blasted fool, you are," said the former politely to the latter.

"Well, it's her fault," replied the driver in an injured tone. "Who'd ever 'a' thought as a lady like her 'u'd be packin' round dead cats!"

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"Pray, *pray* drive away the crowd and let me get to the train," Mrs. Harver said in a low beseeching tone. Her one great longing was to get back to the protection of her own home.

"If this grown-up idjit has been givin' you trouble, ma'am, you'd better give him in charge an' let me run him in. It wou't take ten minutes t' go t' th' station an' fix him. Say th' word, an' I'll get on th' box an' down we goes."

"No, no!" answered Mrs. Harver. "Only help me to get away."

"Very good, ma'am. It's as *you* fixes it. Now then, all of you move on!"

The crowd opened a little at this order, and through the opening—escorted by the policeman, who politely carried her basket for her—Mrs. Harver passed across the sidewalk and into the station. Luckily, a train was just starting. In two minutes she was speeding homeward in it, the basket containing Thomas at her feet, communing with her own agonizing thoughts. Her dominant agonizing thought was that if ever she brought another dead cat out to Germantown to bury it, somebody would have to tell her the reason why!

It was six o'clock when she reached her home. Warned by experience, she had given the street-cars a wide berth and had driven from the station in a carriage—to the driver of which she did not make proposals in regard to the sepulchral disposition of Thomas's remains.

Getting home, even with her mission still unful-

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filled and Thomas still upon her hands, was a great relief to her. There, at least, she was safe. She had hoped strongly that Mr. Harver would have returned—for she longed to pour the story of her misadventures into his sympathetic ears—and she was a good deal disappointed by finding a telegram on the hall table telling that the syndicate business had detained him, and that he would not be able to leave before the midnight train. But she was so profoundly thankful that her trials were ended, and that she was safe within the shelter of her own walls, that she was far from being cast down. Indeed, her feeling of restful security made her positively cheerful.

It seemed heartless to put Thomas for the night in either the cellar or the back yard. Notwithstanding the trouble which he had got her into, she still loved him very tenderly; and because of her love for him she decided that he should pass this last night in his accustomed quarters in Mr. Harver's dressing-room, close beside the bed-basket wherein he had been wont to take his innocent repose.

This matter being settled, Mrs. Harver very thankfully ate her dinner—after all that she had been through she stood in urgent need of solid food—and at the absurdly early hour of nine o'clock she decided to go to bed. The strain upon her nerves during that direful day had wearied her greatly; she really was tired out. Tired though she was, however, she remembered that when Mr. Harver

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came home at some unconscionable hour in the early morning, he certainly would be hungry; and for his refreshment she placed a decanter of sherry and a plate of biscuits on the sideboard, and even put his box of cigars on the library table in readiness for him, should he care to smoke after partaking of this repast. Having performed these kindly offices, she went to bed and to sleep with great celerity. Her last conscious thought was of the rigid little gray figure lying in the next room; and as she passed softly into slumber tears filled her sleepy eyes.

IV

Mrs. Harver woke suddenly, and with a curious feeling of waking in order to discharge immediately an important duty. So strong was this feeling that she found herself out of bed and in her slippers before her slowly arousing reason assured her that there was no important duty for her to discharge. It was very odd, she thought. A point of gas was burning beside her dressing-table. She raised the flame and looked at her watch. It was a little past three o'clock. Outside, she heard the sound of rain falling heavily. By this time she was wide enough awake to perceive that wisdom dictated her immediate return to bed. She concluded that she must have been dreaming.

Following the dictates of wisdom, she was about to turn down the gas when she became conscious

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of a strong smell of tobacco smoke. Then all was clear to her. Mr. Harver had returned—though she did not quite understand how he had managed to get back so soon—and the noise that he had made in closing the front door had awakened her, and at the same time had aroused in her mind the feeling that she had a duty to perform. What this duty was she now knew very well: it was to go down to the library and welcome him home, and while he finished his cigar she could tell him comfortably her tale of woe. She felt greatly refreshed by her five hours and more of sound sleep; she knew what surprise and pleasure would be caused by her unexpected appearance; and the prospect of so unconventional a *tête-à-tête* at three o'clock in the morning with her own husband had a spice of adventure about it that put her in a very sprightly mood.

Under the circumstances there was no need for elaborate dressing. She slipped on a blue cashmere wrapper which Mr. Harver especially approved of—Mrs. Harver was a pronounced blonde, with a great abundance of golden hair, and blue was very becoming to her—and a pair of Turkish blue slippers, embroidered with silver, which set off to excellent advantage her small white feet. Being thus prepared, she very softly opened her bedroom door, and very softly stole down-stairs. Noise was to be avoided, because much of the success of her enterprise depended upon its being an entire surprise.

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The Harver house was of the old-fashioned Philadelphia type—the most comfortable sort of city house that ever has been devised. In the deep back building, up a half-flight of stairs from the front hall, was the dining-room; and in the rear of this, practically a part of it when the intervening folding doors were open, was the library. Up a half-flight of stairs from the dining-room level was the first floor of the front building. The front room on this floor—reached by a long passage from the head of the stairs—was Mrs. Harver's bedroom; the back room, which also opened upon the passage, was Mr. Harver's dressing-room—where Thomas had been wont to sleep, and where he then was lying in the silver-basket wrapped in newspapers and in an eternal repose.

As Mrs. Harver tiptoed along the passage in her Turkish blue slippers the odor of tobacco smoke grew stronger, and when she came to the head of the half-flight of stairs she perceived through the open door of the dining-room that the gas in the library was burning brightly. She descended the stairs with the utmost caution, softly laughing to herself as she thought how surprised and how pleased Mr. Harver would be in a minute or two, and so came noiselessly to the dining-room door. From this point her view of the library was unobstructed. There he was, sure enough; at least there was one of his elbows and a part of one of his legs projecting at the side of the high-backed lounging-chair in which he was seated, and on the

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floor where he had dropped it lay his Gladstone bag. He seemed to be making himself exceedingly comfortable. Within easy reach, on the library table, was the decanter of sherry and a tumbler—it struck Mrs. Harver as odd that her husband, who was nice in such matters, should be drinking sherry out of a tumbler—and in close proximity to this liquid refreshment was the open box of cigars. The overhanging cloud showed that he was smoking vigorously.

Mrs. Harver's plan of campaign was to steal up behind Mr. Harver's chair and suddenly to put her two pretty little white hands in front of his eyes. This innocent pleasantry, she believed, would make him jump. She thought that it would be great fun to make him jump.

Her blue wrapper was of a soft unrustling material, and her slippered feet moved over the carpet noiselessly; favored by which circumstances she reached her desired point of vantage unobserved, and was in the very act of sliding her hands over the back of the chair when she made a very startling discovery: the head against which she was making these strategic advances was not covered with an abundance of dark brown hair—as Mr. Harver's head was—but with so meagre a sandy thatch that all the top of it was bald! Upon perceiving these highly disconcerting cranial conditions, she most naturally started back with an "Oh!" expressive of great perturbation and surprise.

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The effect upon the person in the chair of this abrupt revelation of her presence was to make him jump quite as energetically as Mrs. Harver had expected Mr. Harver to jump; but the situation now was so radically changed that Mrs. Harver did not see anything at all funny in his sudden exaltation. As he gained his feet, and instantly faced about upon her, he uttered with great earnestness the Saxon name of the abode of departed sinful souls, and coupled with this exclamation the terse inquiry: "Who's that?"

For some seconds Mrs. Harver and the man contemplated each other over the back of the chair in silence, and in mutual surprise and alarm. The man, perceiving that Mrs. Harver was not at all a dangerous-looking person, was the first to recover composure sufficiently to speak.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, pleasantly. "I fear that my presence here has startled you. I am very sorry. Pray be seated—and permit me to offer you a glass of your own excellent sherry: it will do you good."

The tone in which these words were spoken was so entirely that of conventional society, and the words were so entirely those which any gentleman might have addressed under similar circumstances to any lady, that Mrs. Harver instantly felt relieved. The presence of this stranger in her house at this hour of the night certainly was peculiar, but his agreeable manner and assured air implied that the situation was susceptible of a common-

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place and satisfactory explanation. The hypothesis that not unnaturally suggested itself to her mind was that he was somebody connected with the syndicate whom Mr. Harver had brought home with him, and who had been left temporarily alone in the



"I AM VERY SORRY. PRAY BE SEATED"

library while Mr. Harver had gone to the pantry to fetch from the silver-safe—in which he frequently kept valuable papers—some document relating to the business in hand. Being thus assured, she accepted the offered sherry gratefully. The shock

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incident to what, at the moment, had seemed an alarming discovery had made her feel a little faint.

"Oh, thank you," she said as she seated herself. "You will find a glass on the sideboard in the other room."

The man rose with a polite alacrity; brought a wineglass from the sideboard; filled it, and handed it to Mrs. Harver with quite an air. As he crossed the room she had a good opportunity to look at him, and the result of her inspection was to make the existing situation still more confusing. He was very shabbily dressed, and in garments which had the look of having been shabby always; not the dress of a gentleman at all. Moreover, as he walked, his gait was so curiously unsteady that involuntarily she looked at the decanter. It was a quart decanter, and when she had left it on the sideboard it had been full. Now, it was nearly empty. Under these circumstances, Mrs. Harver again experienced sensations of alarm.

Having filled her glass and handed it to her, he emptied the remainder of the sherry into his tumbler, raised it to his lips with a bow, and said: "Madam, to your very good health!"

Involuntarily, in natural reply to this courtesy, Mrs. Harver bowed also, and smiled.

"It's a shocking night, isn't it?" said the man, with the evident intention of making conversation; and added: "I managed to get quite soaked through."

"Oh, I hope you haven't caught cold," Mrs.

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Harver replied, with a polite concern. The sherry had sent a genial glow through her body, and the man was treating her so obviously as his hostess, that—even if he had taken a little more wine than was good for him—she felt compelled to treat him as her guest.

“Thanks, you’re very good,” he answered. “I certainly should have caught a horrid cold but for your sherry. I was completely chilled when I came in; chilled all the way through, I assure you. You see, I had to come off in something of a hurry, and I missed my dinner. Getting drenched and chilled that way on an empty stomach is upsetting. It was Sydney Smith—wasn’t it?—who objected to taking exercise on his own empty stomach, and wanted to take it on somebody else’s. What a droll dog he was!”

He laughed pleasantly, and finished his sherry at a gulp. His manner of drinking wine certainly was not elegant, Mrs. Harver thought; and not at all in keeping with his agreeable manner and his easy reference to Sydney Smith. But Mr. Harver had told her that there were some very queer people in the syndicate—Western men with a good deal of the bark on, as he had expressed it—and she concluded that this must be one of them.

“And then, of course, the strain was all the harder on me,” he went on, “because it came at the period of lowest vitality. The human system, you know, is at its ebb between the hours of one and three in the morning. That physiological fact

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handicaps men in my line of life badly. It is a heavy tax upon the nervous organization to be compelled to exert one's self most strenuously at the very season of approximate collapse—the season which nature has designed for recuperative repose. But all professions have their annoyances. I don't doubt that your husband suffers at times from nervous exhaustion. Stock-broking is a wearing business."

The tone of the man's voice was so entirely the tone of polite society, and his talk flowed on so naturally, that Mrs. Harver was set entirely at her ease. She leaned back comfortably in her chair, and at the same time placed her slippered feet upon a footstool. She was about to reply that Mr. Harver was at that very time a good deal run down by overwork in connection with the syndicate, and that she thought he ought to take a holiday. But she did not make these observations—for the quick glance that the man gave toward the footstool, and his instantly suppressed smile, brought suddenly to her mind the horrifying consciousness that she was without stockings!

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in great confusion, blushing charmingly, and hastily tucking the skirt of her wrapper about her feet. "I quite forgot. You see—you see, when I came down I thought you were Mr. Harver."

"Pray do not apologize, madam. I quite understand. I am married myself. And, I assure you, I cordially agree with Suckling about the charm of

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—I have forgotten precisely how the lines run, it is something about ‘a sweet disorder in the dress,’ and ‘little feet like mice stole out,’ and a ‘tempestuous petticoat.’ I rather think that I’m mixing my poets, part of that is Herrick, I’m sure—but never mind. I used to quote those lines to the first Mrs. Wilbraham—my wife, you know. She was very precise in matters of dress; really too precise, I used to tell her.”

Mrs. Harver was very grateful for the delicacy shown in diverting the conversation so neatly from the embarrassing region of her bare feet; and she was glad to find out, though she did not recognize it, this polite gentleman’s name.

“You are very kind indeed, Mr. Wilbraham—” she began.

“I beg your pardon,” he interrupted, “that is not my name.”

“But you spoke of your wife as—”

“Ah, I see. The mistake is natural. No, it is not my name—but Mrs. Wilbraham always is the name of my wife.” He paused for a moment for the evident purpose of enjoying Mrs. Harver’s obvious inability to draw from this paradoxical statement any reasonable conclusion. “You can’t make it out, can you?” he continued, smiling affably. “Well, I will explain: You see, whenever I am married, I call my wife Mrs. Wilbraham, and by the uniform use of that name I give a pleasing sense of continuity to what in fact—owing to the unavoidable intervention of extraneous circum-

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stances — is a varying, I may almost say a spasmodic relation. Do I make myself clear?"

"No," answered Mrs. Harver, who could make neither head nor tail of this extraordinary utterance; "I am afraid that you don't—at least, not quite."

"Why, it's this way," he went on, in a carefully explanatory tone: "In our profession, you understand, frequent and sudden changes of residence are necessary. Sometimes I am able to take my wife with me; usually, however, I am forced to leave her behind—and, so far as I am concerned, that is the end of her."

"Oh!" interjected Mrs. Harver.

"Trying, isn't it?—and the more so because I am of an exceedingly domestic temperament, and never am entirely happy save in the peaceful retirement of my own home. It is because of this amiable weakness in my nature that almost my first act upon arriving in a new city is to marry a new wife—regularly marry her, you know, in ship-shape fashion, with a parson and a ring. And then, by the simple device of calling her, as usual, Mrs. Wilbraham—that hallowed name around which, in the course of years, have clustered tender memories so numerous and so varied—I scarcely notice, amidst my new surroundings, that the strict continuity of my domestic happiness has suffered a trifling temporary break. Will you pardon me if I take a fresh cigar?"

Being accustomed to reply to requests of this

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nature with a polite affirmative, Mrs. Harver was moved by association of ideas to smile and to say, "Certainly." Her response was purely automatic. She was oppressed by the effort, characteristic of a very bad variety of nightmare, to believe impossibilities possible. In itself, the system of geographically diffuse polygamy presented for her consideration was incredible; but, on the other hand, it was presented with a sincerity so obvious as to compel belief. A helpless confusion of ideas was unavoidable while thus the irresistible was colliding with the immovable in the troubled mazes of her mind.

Evidently unconscious of the effect which his words were producing, the man lighted a fresh cigar, smoked for a minute or two in silence, and then, in a tone of meditative retrospection, resumed: "The lady to whom I referred just now as being so precise in regard to her dress, the one I used to quote Herrick to, was what I may term the first chapter in my conjugal serial. She was a Bostonian—as I am myself"—there was a touch of natural pride in his voice as he made this self-enobling statement—"and we were married within a year of my graduation from Harvard. It was the conventional marriage of conventional society, and—as I had not at that time taken up my profession—was intended to be permanent. How odd it all seems now, as I look back at it! Ah, me! I was young then—only just turned of two-and-twenty. And now, heigh-ho, I am turned of forty-five! I refrain from the hackneyed quotation in the origi-

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nal, but the Latin poet certainly cut painfully close to the truth when he said that time flies, didn't he?"

At the words "conjugal serial," Mrs. Harver had pinched herself furtively to make sure that she was awake. The physiological response, in the shape of acute pain, to this simple psychological test having convinced her that she could not be dreaming, her mind had grown more and more numb in the hopeless effort to grasp and to co-ordinate the disorganized impossibilities which were offered to her by this singular person in the guise of the most commonplace facts. The one point at all clear to her was that in some unaccountable way—which she obviously was supposed to understand—his panoramic scheme of matrimony was the natural outgrowth of his profession; and, this thought being the only clear concept in her mind as he ceased speaking, she sought along the line thus indicated for further enlightenment.

"What *is* your profession?" she asked.

"Why, bless my soul!" the man exclaimed. "I thought you understood all along. I'm a burglar."

V

So strained were Mrs. Harver's receptive faculties, and so pleasantly and naturally was this statement made, that some seconds elapsed before she at all grasped its horrifying import. When she

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did realize the situation, however, her suddenly aroused mind worked with a vigor that was all the more marked because it went off at a decided tangent with the facts.

“A burglar !” she shrieked—and instantly sprang



“‘A BURGLAR !’ SHE SHRIEKED”

upon the chair in which she had been seated and tucked her skirts in tight around her feet. The lucid explanation which she gave subsequently of this curious action was that rats were her greatest horror, and that it was like rats just then.

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The burglar also sprang to his feet. "'S-s-s-h!" he exclaimed. "Don't make a row like that. You'll wake everybody up."

He was quite steady upon his legs, and spoke clearly and sharply. Apparently the abrupt break in the conversation had had the effect of counter-acting what remained of the mellowing influence of the sherry. This inference was encouraged by the business-like tone and tenor of his next utterance.

"Come," he said, "I can't afford to fool around here any longer. I must get to work. Where do you keep your silver?"

Without replying to this question, Mrs. Harver untucked her skirts from about her feet—realizing that the especial peril in which she found herself was not adequately met by this particular measure of defence—and stepped down from the chair. She was a plucky little woman, and—now that she had got over the first shock of alarm—she was not by any means badly frightened. She was quite cool enough to know that the best thing for her to do was to get to the district telegraph call, in Mr. Harver's dressing-room, and to ring for a policeman; and she was silent not because she was frightened, but because her wits were at work trying to devise some plan by which this intelligent flank movement could be executed.

Not unnaturally, however, the burglar attributed her silence to fear; and it was in a reassuring tone that he continued: "I say, I'm not going to hurt

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you—not if you behave yourself, that is. But I'm here on business, and I've got to get at it. I was so wet and cold and hungry when I came in that the sherry was too much for me. I'm all right now, and I mean to put this job through with a rush to make up for lost time. You take the silver up-stairs nights, don't you? Whereabouts is it? And who's up there? Not your husband, I know, for he's in New York. Now, then, speak up lively. There's no time to lose."

Mrs. Harver would have been a good deal startled by this exhibition of accurate knowledge in regard to her husband's movements had not her mind suddenly become engrossed by consideration of what seemed to be a perfectly feasible plan—suggested to her by the question as to the whereabouts of the silver—for getting within reach of the district telegraph call. The emotional side of her nature rejected this plan, deeming it a close approach to sacrilege; but the intellectual side—urging that the claims of practical utility were superior to the claims of mere sentimentality—carried the day. Therefore she answered: "Excepting the servants in the attics, there is no one in the house beside myself. And the silver-basket," Mrs. Harver spoke with a nice precision that the burglar by no means appreciated, "is in Mr. Harver's dressing-room—the room just at the head of those stairs. If you are in a hurry, we had better go there at once."

"Now that's coolness, and it's also sense," he answered, admiringly; and added: "Pardon me if

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I reverse the custom of good society and take your arm, instead of offering you mine."

"Certainly," Mrs. Harver replied ; but her heart sank a little as she felt the burglar's hand settle upon her arm in a vigorous clasp.

"Don't be alarmed," he said, as they went up the stairs together. "Giving you this police grip seems brutal, I know. But, you see, I've got to keep on the safe side. If I gave you the chance, you might take it into your head to bolt and try to raise the servants. Is this the room?"

"Yes, but the door is locked on the inside. I must trouble you to come around through the front room. This way, please." In spite of herself, there was a slight touch of eagerness in Mrs. Harver's tone.

The burglar stopped short, and his clutch upon her arm perceptibly tightened. In a low but deeply earnest voice he said : "See here, you're a long ways too polite and obliging. You're up to some sort of mischief. Now just take my advice and, whatever it is, don't try it on—for as sure as you do I'll stick a knife into you ! I've run this business in Beacon Street style, so far, because you're a lady and I'm a gentleman. But I want you to understand that it *is* business, all the same, and that if you try to come any of your monkey shines on me you'll get hurt. If you've got a man up here, and mean to spring him on me, it 'll be the worse for you—for I swear to Heaven I'll make sure of killing you before the fight begins ! The comic opera

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part of this performance is played out. We've got along to the cold facts. If there's anybody in there, say so. If there isn't, go ahead."

Standing in the dark, with a burglar grasping her arm and threatening in tones of obvious sincerity to murder her, Mrs. Harver naturally was exceedingly alarmed. The situation was a trying and an unusual one. But, fortunately, being a little woman—and therefore quick-tempered—her anger overcame her fear. The brazen impudence of the proposal to kill her in her own house, and especially on the part of a proposer who had not a shadow of right to be inside of it, irritated her to such an extent that her strongest desire was to push ahead with her plan for bringing up her would-be murderer with a very round turn. For a moment she set her teeth hard, and then she said: "I have told you already that there is no one on this floor. If you prefer to break in a locked door to opening a door that is not locked, I am sure that I have no objections. I really think, though, that you will save time by coming around through my room."

Mrs. Harver's composure was more apparent than real. Every nerve in her body was tense, and her heart was beating violently. She held her breath while she waited for the burglar's reply—and it was with a sigh of relief that she felt his grasp upon her arm relax and heard him say, in tones of deep conviction: "You certainly are the very coolest woman I ever came across. You'd chill a refrigerator!

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Come along"—and then they went on into the front room.

The gas was burning at a full head, as Mrs. Harver had left it. On her dressing-table was her watch and a tray in which were a pair of bracelets and some rings. The burglar's trained eye caught the glitter of these objects, and he stepped toward them.

Mrs. Harver restrained him gently. "Will it not be a more convenient arrangement to get the silver-basket first?" she asked. "My little things can go right in on top, you know."

The burglar looked at her admiringly. "There's sense in that," he said, and added: "You really are a wonderful woman. I used to think that the third Mrs. Wilbraham—no, it was the fourth, the Chicago one—was cool. But she was nothing to you. I should say that in summer you'd be useful as an ice-machine!"

Ignoring this compliment, though she highly appreciated it, Mrs. Harver suffered herself to be led into the dressing-room—where one of the gas-jets over the bureau, in readiness for Mr. Harver's coming, was lighted and turned low. The bureau stood against the rear wall between the windows. On a chair in front of one of these windows, directly beneath the lighted gas-jet, was the silver-basket containing Thomas's remains. Against the frame of the other window, concealed by the curtain, was the district telegraph call. Mrs. Harver's breath was coming in little gasps.

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As the burglar turned the gas up full he gave a quick glance around him to make sure that he had not been led into some sort of a trap. But he saw no signs of a trap—and there was the promised silver-basket. It was a large, satisfactory silver-basket, with the look of weighing many pounds. In his eagerness to test its weight he dropped Mrs. Harver's arm and poised the basket in his hand—and the slight jingling sound that came from within as he raised it fell very musically upon his ear. Mrs. Harver's fingers were upon the key of the call box at that moment, and the jingling almost unnerved her for the task that she had in hand—so intimately was it associated with tender memories of a trotting little gray figure which nevermore would trot again! The feeling that in using Thomas as a decoy cat she was committing sacrilege again occurred to her. What indignity might not be put upon his remains should the burglar open the basket? This thought fortunately came to steady her. With a firm hand she moved the key back to the police call.

On the burglar's face was a sunny smile as he exclaimed: "Twenty pounds, if there's an ounce! This is what *I* call luck!"

B-z-z-z-z-z! A patter of feet on the carpet! The slamming of a door, followed instantly by the click of a lock!

These phenomena, although successive, occurred with such rapidity that to the burglar they seemed to be simultaneous. At their conclusion he found

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himself alone with the silver-basket, and momentarily stunned by the shock incident to a painful but ideally complete surprise.

As his shock subsided, acting less on reason than on impulse, he rushed to the closed door and lunged against it with his shoulder violently. The noise produced by this concussion was dangerously loud. He hesitated before repeating the blow. This unlooked-for demonstration alarmed Mrs. Harver—whose mental arrangement of the matter had been that he would try to run away, and would be caught by the policeman in the back alley; not that he would remain and murder her before the policeman arrived. She therefore felt called upon to counsel him, and, while he hesitated about continuing his battery against the door, addressed him in distinct tones from the other side:

“I don’t think that you quite understand. Please listen for a moment,” she said politely. “I have rung for a policeman. When we call a messenger, one usually comes within four minutes. The policeman probably will get here in about the same time. If you want to leave before his arrival you have very little time—three minutes, at the most. Of course I don’t want to seem to hurry you—but, indeed, I think that you had better go.”

Before Mrs. Harvey had quite finished this deliverance of intelligent advice the burglar had begun to act upon it. She heard him unlock and open the door leading into the passage; she heard him dash down-stairs, and she heard the slam-

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ming behind him of the spring-door leading into the kitchen. An instant later there was the sound of hurrying footsteps on the front pavement, and then a sharp ring at the bell.

Mrs. Harver opened a window and saw a policeman standing on the steps. "Quick!" she cried. "There's a burglar getting away by the alley!"

The man was off around the corner like a flash.

Mrs. Harver still was leaning out of the window, looking in the direction in which the policeman had gone, when a cab drove up to the front door and Mr. Harver got out of it. He was a good deal surprised by finding his wife popping out at the front window that way at four o'clock in the morning. In a moment the situation was explained to him—and then he was off around the corner like another flash to help the policeman.

Naturally, Mrs. Harver was desirous of seeing as much as possible of what was going on; and in the hope that some part of the scene of operations would be visible from one of the windows in Mr. Harver's dressing-room, she unlocked the door again and passed into that apartment. But she never got to either of the windows. Midway in her passage across the room she stopped suddenly and stood with agonized wide-open eyes staring into ghastly nothingness—the silver-basket, with Thomas inside of it, was gone! With a deep groan she collapsed into a heap upon the floor and burst into tears.

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There she sat, weeping bitterly, when, ten minutes later, Mr. Harver came back with the information that the burglar had got safe away.

"Then Thomas is lost to us forever!" she said in hollow tones of woe.



"‘A—DEAD—CAT!’ HE SAID SLOWLY”

Mr. Harver pressed for an explanation, and in a voice broken with sobs she told the story of her too successful strategy that had led to this agonizing result. "Oh! Oh!" she cried, in the bitterness of her grief, while Mr. Harver clasped her to his

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breast and tried to soothe her. "Don't say that it don't matter, and that I'll get over it in time. It *does* matter, and I'll *never* get over it. He was the best and the sweetest cat that ever lived—and I've gone and made a ca-cat's-paw of the wh-whole of him—and now we never can bury him at all!"

It is a fact to be noted that the burglar was no better pleased with the result of Mrs. Harver's strategic use of Thomas than she was herself. Upon opening the basket, in the seclusion of his own home, his indignation was so great that for some seconds he was unable to speak at all. When the use of his vocal apparatus was restored to him, his words were vigorous but few.

"A—dead—cat!" he said slowly, and with a most bitter contempt. And then, in exclamatory tones, he uttered the Saxon name of the abode of departed sinful souls.



IN THE ST. PETER'S SET



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I

IT is well understood in Philadelphia—and the better understood because it is generally denied—that the position occupied in that city by the “nice” portion of the congregation of St. Peter’s Church is much the same as that occupied in the less well-ordered (because less exclusive) community of Paradise by the Senior Seraphim.

There are several other churches in Philadelphia—St. Mark’s, St. James’s, Holy Trinity—to which one may belong with entire propriety. As to the St. Clement’s people—well, they occupy, as the æsthetic set did in London, a place by themselves. They go in for color and candles, and one never can be quite sure what they will or will not do next. In a word, they are lacking in that veneration for established customs without which a Philadelphian might as well be anybody else.

But none of these churches stands in its own graveyard. St. Peter’s does. That, mainly, is what gives it a social precedence. A graveyard—pro-

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vided it contains the right sort of graves—is conservative, in a very literal sense of the word, of good society. The St. Peter's people, Sunday after Sunday, go in to the service of the Sanctuary between files of decorous tombstones on which are carved their father's and their grandfather's, and their great-grandfather's names: all of whom, and the remoter generations back of them, have died in the odor of Philadelphia respectability; and all of whom, therefore, have come from (even as Philadelphia bricks come from), and are in the process of returning to, a distinctly superior sort of clay. Fortified by their family tombstones as by a rampart, the temporal pinnacle upon which the St. Peter's people socially are exalted is unassailable; while in regard to eternal matters they are upborne by the agreeable conviction that they are entitled to a more than respectable future because they have had a more than respectable past.

In modern times, with the shifting of population incident to the city's growth, the Faubourg St. Pierre has ceased to be geographically in the vicinity of the church—on South Third and South Fourth streets, and along the lower reaches of Spruce and Pine. That region, to be sure, is not wholly abandoned; but the families which were to be found there in the past generation are now to be found, for the most part, in that portion of the city which is focussed on Rittenhouse Square. A serious and substantial quarter of the city is this; a little corrupted, unfortunately, within the past

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few years by the work of light-minded architects who have set at defiance the traditional white marble trimmings and seemly red bricks, but utterly unlike the North Broad Street region with its various flippancies in tortured stone.

Yet while the Faubourg has migrated westward, its social organization has remained intact. It permits, it even recognizes, the existence of an outside world; but it declines, of course, to have anything to do with the dwellers in that remote barbaric wild. Neither wit nor wealth will serve as a password for those who would enter its carefully exclusive circle. Even as sixteen quarterings are required on the part of those who would ally themselves with the old German nobility, so must the candidate for admission to the St. Peter's set be in a position to exhibit at least six generations of reputable family tombstones ranged in a decent row.

Precisely because the recognition of this calmly superior body is so difficult to obtain, every Philadelphian who yearns to be among the socially elect denies that such recognition is of even the smallest value—and covets it above pearls of price.

II

For Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood to aspire to admission to the St. Peter's set was nothing less than sheer effrontery. She and her husband between them could muster only five ancestral tombstones—

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four of which belonged to their immediate progenitors, and none of which was at all the right kind. However, her presumption was born of ignorance. She would have essayed much less had she but known a little more.

What she counted upon mainly to carry her through was the fifth tombstone—that is to say, her husband's grandfather. He was not much of a grandfather, for he had been only a currier in a Philadelphia tannery. But he was real; and by speaking of him as a leather dealer he instantly became highly respectable—that being a branch of business in excellent repute among the Quaker stock in Philadelphia two generations ago. Presumably, Mr. Ballingwood also had possessed a grandfather in the female line; but this shy ancestor, when search was made for him, eluded capture.

Mrs. Ballingwood's paternal grandfather was purely inferential. Through her father, who came of the Celtic house of McShane, she could trace her pedigree only to the doors of Castle Garden. There it stopped short. But she had no desire to go beyond that closed portal. In itself, the name was so much more than enough for her purposes that she had made her husband promise never to utter it—not even in confidential talk with herself. On the maternal side her case was better, for there rudimentary traces of a serviceable article of grandfather survived. She remembered that her mother had spoken about feeding pigs and chickens, and also about driving cows to pasture—from which

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facts she arrived at the conclusion that her grandfather must have been a farmer. This base being established, she argued—from his possession of several pigs and of more than one cow—that he must have been a farmer of means; or, in other words, a country gentleman. But she also remembered allusions on her mother's part to "father's store"—which seemed to warrant her in describing her grandfather as a merchant; and as this was a substantial calling she was disposed to adopt it. Mr. Ballingwood suggested that the bucolic and the commercial features of the case could be harmonized by the reasonable assumption that her grandfather had kept a country store—but his suggestion was not well received.

Such was the ancestral case which this aspiring lady made out for herself. With her husband's paternal grandfather, who could be made presentable by using him with a judicious restraint; with her own maternal grandfather, who could be handled with great freedom because so little was known about him; and with a bank account as overwhelming as it was genuine to glaze over all deficiencies, Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood—such was her innocence!—believed that she could induce the straitest sect in Philadelphia to admit her within its pale.

In Pittsburgh—this was after her husband had invented his direct-leverage roll, and the rolling-mill people, on the strength of it, had promoted him from foreman to a partnership—Mrs. Ballingwood had made her way into the upper regions of

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Pittsburgh society without difficulty. When they came to Philadelphia—her husband, by that time, being general manager of the stock company that had been formed—she achieved what she believed to be a like social success in even a shorter time. They had bought a house on North Broad Street—geographically the most desirable part of the town to live in—and she was astonished, for she had heard a good deal about Philadelphia exclusiveness, by the celerity with which her neighbors in that auriferous region became her friends.

Before she had lived in Philadelphia a year, however, she recognized the fact that she was not really in Philadelphia society at all. So far as that society was concerned, she might as well still have been in Pittsburgh; indeed, better—for Pittsburgh simply was a part of the outside world, with no especial stigma attaching to its inhabitants: while for her to live in Philadelphia and yet to live north of Market Street (lacking, as she did, the saving grace of relationship to any of the Arch Street Quaker families) was to bring a hopeless blot upon the place where the 'scutcheon which she did not happen to possess ought to be.

At the end of a year she effected a change of base. She ordered the purchase of the best house that could be bought in the proper part of Walnut Street, and when this order had been executed they took up their abode in what by that time she knew to be the correct quarter of the town. Until then her husband had written his name John C. Balling-

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wood. After their migration southward the John vanished, and the C. was expanded into Catesby—in which reconstructed shape his name appeared on their Walnut Street cards.

But Mr. Ballingwood marched at the extreme rear of this procession and manifested little enthusiasm. "What's the good of it all?" he asked in a remonstrant spirit when Mrs. Ballingwood issued her order for the move southward. "We're ever so much more comfortable here than we will be down town. And what's the sense of pulling up stakes just as we've got to knowing our neighbors and are beginning to feel at home?"

"It's because of the neighbors that we must go, Jack—I mean Catesby." (Mrs. Ballingwood was struggling bravely to call her husband Catesby, but the change came hard. Her effort to make him address her as Mary was a dead failure.) "They're not the right sort of neighbors at all. Now that the children are growing up I want them to move in really good society; to belong to the same set of old families that your grandfather must have belonged to, Ja—Catesby."

"'Jacatesby' is good," replied Mr. Ballingwood, taking an unfair advantage of his wife's slip between habit and intention, "but I'm not as big a jacatesby as I look. What sort of a set of old families did my grandfather the currier ever belong to, I'd like to know?"

"Please, please remember, Catesby, that you've promised me always to speak about your grandfather

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as a leather dealer. Currier does sound so low! I don't mean, of course, that your grandfather knew many of the nice people intimately. He was too poor for that, of course. But with his name he must have belonged to the very best. Why, at Mrs. Dowd's the other day—she knows quite a lot of down-town people, you know—you ought to have heard her pluming herself upon having been to a tea that a Mrs. Hector Ballingwood gave. You know perfectly well that the Ballingwoods are one of the very best of the old families—and that the Catesbys are too."

"And you know perfectly well that I'm no more related to the Catesbys than I am to the man in the moon—that I'm only named after old John Catesby, who owned the tannery where grandfather used to work. And I ain't the right kind of a Ballingwood, either. The swell family spells the name with only one l. Bartrand told me that, years ago in Pittsburgh. He said he had relatives in Philadelphia of my name; but when he found that I spelled it with two l's he said I didn't come of his stock. You remember Bartrand, don't you? He was that young fellow from Philadelphia who came to our mill to learn the business before he went out to the Philadelphia plant in Colorado—the fellow I had that fight with at the picnic because he had the cheek to want to dance with you three times running."

"I remember that there was such a person," Mrs. Ballingwood replied a little consciously; "but

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no matter what he said about the spelling, it's all the same family, of course. Please remember that—and about his not being a currier, too."

"All right, Polly, I'll drop the currying-board and slap the old man right up at the head of the concern. Don't you worry, I'll get him straight before folks. But I tell you for a cold fact that unless you stop changing that grandfather of yours around from one thing to another I'll get tangled on him, sure. Can't you straighten him out anyway? I know your mother died when you weren't much more'n a baby—but didn't McShane ever tell you anything about him?"

"Oh, Jack—I mean Catesby—do be more careful. You know we agreed that we never—not even in talking to each other—would mention father's name."

"He was a devilish good fellow, all the same," said Mr. Ballingwood, stoutly, "and it was a good day's work for me when I was put on his gang of rolls. If it hadn't been for that I'd never have laid eyes on you, like enough, Polly."

"Dear father—of course he was as good as he could be. But indeed we musn't talk about him. It is such a perfectly hopeless name, you know. And we must think of the children, Jack—Catesby."

"Good enough, old woman. I'll try to keep my mouth shut about old man Mike—that's what us fellows at the rolls always called him, you know—

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and we'll play your grandfather the merchant and my grandfather the leather dealer for all they're worth. I guess we'll make things go."

III

On this basis of a judiciously suppressed and expanded ancestry, Mrs. Ballingwood's down-town campaign opened, as she believed, brilliantly. Several of the friends of her friend Mrs. Dowd called upon her; and, later, the friends of these friends called also. The street names of the unknowable North vanished from her card-basket, and in place thereof came the street names of the aristocratic South. All of which was very well indeed.

But the painful truth presently became manifest to Mrs. Ballingwood that while the names of the streets were all right, the names of the people were all, or nearly all, wrong. They were not the old Philadelphia names, and their possessors were not in the least of the old Philadelphia stock. Still worse, as she assured herself by farther investigation, almost every one of these new friends was just such an outsider as she was herself, and was making just such a fight as she was making to get inside. All of which was most discouragingly bad.

Her one substantial advance had been the achievement of the acquaintance—through the useful Mrs. Dowd—of Mrs. Hector Balingwood, whom she was determined to regard in the light of a relative not-

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withstanding the fact that the name was spelled with but a single l. When she referred to the possible relationship she did not receive, it must be confessed, any great amount of encouragement. Mrs. Balingwood frankly declared that she could not begin to understand the intricacies of Philadelphia family connections, and as frankly thanked heaven that she had been born in New York, where—as she observed with a flippant irreverence that was in keeping with her unfortunate origin—people did not insist upon making a perpetual exhibition of all their ancestral dead.

But persistent endeavor rarely fails to conquer Fate: which exalted truth Mrs. Ballingwood realized when—upon the occasion of her second call at the house of her apocryphal relative—she was so fortunate as to strike up an intimacy with Mrs. Pennington Brown. It was much more than a mere casual meeting. Other visitors came in, by whom the attention of their hostess was engaged, and they had a long and very friendly talk: in the course of which the open-hearted scion of the McShanes was led on by sympathetic (yet not wholly artless) questioning to reveal much more than she realized of her somewhat shady past, and the whole of her hopes in regard to her entirely brilliant future.

The outcome of this agreeable interview seemed to be the certainty that all for which she hoped was about to come to pass. In the most cordial manner Mrs. Brown announced that she would

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call upon Mrs. Ballingwood on that lady's next ensuing day at home ; and that subsequently—at as early a date as could be arranged—she would have the pleasure of giving to Mr. and Mrs. Ballingwood a dinner-party at which they would meet precisely the blue-blooded variety of Philadelphians whom they longed to know.

Naturally, Mrs. Ballingwood came home all in a flutter over this fortunate turn in her affairs. “It is the best thing that has happened to us yet, Catesby,” she declared with enthusiasm. “Mrs. Pennington Brown is the very nicest of the nice. Her mother was a Port—the sister of that very aristocratic Mr. Hutchinson Port that Mr. Dowd was telling such queer stories about the other night at dinner.”

“Do you mean that old beast who told some lady at her own table that she didn't know how canvas-back ducks ought to be cooked?”

“Yes, that one. It wasn't nice, of course—but he's very eccentric, you know ; and cooking is his hobby. He's her uncle ; and he was her guardian for a while, too. Her husband, Mrs. Dowd says, was one of the Browns—the family that's all mixed in somehow with William Penn. Her marriage seems to have been such a sad romance. Her husband was quite an old gentleman, and he died of rheumatic fever in Russia while they were on their wedding journey. She is very brave about it. She spoke about his death so coldly that a careless listener would have been quite deceived—but I could

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see plainly how deeply she felt it, and how cruelly her poor heart was wrung."

"Oh, it's that Dorothy Lee woman, is it?"

"Why, Catesby, what do you mean?"

"I know all about her, now. Two of our directors were talking about her the other day after the board meeting. They didn't leave her a leg to stand on. They said that she had a devil of a temper and nearly drove her uncle wild while he was her guardian; and that she married old Brown partly for the sake of his money and partly to get a free foot; and that she carted him off to Russia on purpose to let the cold get in its work on his rheumatism and kill him—as it did. She seems to be a bad lot all the way through."

"I'm sure it's a string of wicked falsehoods from beginning to end," Mrs. Ballingwood replied hotly. "There's nothing that men—especially old men—won't say against a woman. I know it's all false, and that I can trust her—she has such a frank manner and such lovely gray eyes."

Actually, the slanders repeated by Mr. Ballingwood—as must be made clear in simple justice to the slandered—rested upon a very slim foundation of fact. It was true that Mr. Pennington Brown had died suddenly in St. Petersburg of acute rheumatic fever—induced, generally, by adverse climatic conditions; and, specifically, by exposure to extreme cold upon a sledging frolic which his wife (who delighted in sledging) quite unintentionally had prolonged until he was chilled to the very mar-

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row of his old bones. But the assertion that she deliberately had sought to compass his death by exposing him to the rigors of a northern winter was—as Mrs. Ballingwood very properly had said it was—a wicked falsehood.

The fact of the matter was that Mrs. Pennington Brown had not thought about her husband one way or the other. Her simple concept of the St. Petersburg expedition was that she wanted to go there herself—and with this lady, whose amiable habit it was to assume that her own personal contentment was equivalent to universal happiness, a strong desire to do anything or to go anywhere always was an amply sufficient reason for doing it or going it at once. So far from being unmoved by Mr. Brown's untimely death, the sad occurrence occasioned her a great deal of annoyance and surprise—which welling up of deep feeling was none the less sincere because her admirably balanced head enabled her to apply the excellent restraint of philosophy to the flutterings of her wounded heart.

“It was very trying indeed, Uncle Hutchinson,” this consolate widow observed in the course of a conversation with her relative immediately succeeding her return to America, “to have poor dear Pennington die that way—and right at the very height of the delightful winter season, too. But we had half a winter, anyway, and enjoyed every bit of it—at least I did—and that was a great deal better than nothing at all. You know I *always* wanted *you* to take me to St. Petersburg ; and you

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never would, you selfish dear. But my heart was quite set on going, and if I hadn't married and got there that way I'm sure that sooner or later you would have given in—for you never could be cruel to your angel for long at a time, you know.

“And how odd it would have been, Uncle Hutchinson,” the angel continued in a tone of thoughtful interest, “if things had turned out that way—if I hadn't married poor dear Pennington, you know, and gone with him, but had gone with you and it had been you who had died there? Wouldn't that have been queer? But you're quite safe now, you dear thing. I don't want to go again; and even if I did I wouldn't have to bother you—for it's one of the comfortable things about being a widow that I can go about alone as much as I please.”

IV

Being compelled by business reasons, after her husband's death, to return to the halls of her Philadelphia ancestors, Mrs. Pennington Brown found herself bored almost to desperation. Although born in those halls, she had left them at a very early stage in her earthly pilgrimage; and almost the whole of her life had been passed on the eastern side of the Atlantic. Her hereditary Philadelphia instincts had been obliterated by her foreign environment; and life in Philadelphia—such was the perversion of her nature—seemed to her a

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penance more than she could bear. To liken her, during her enforced temporary residence in that severely ordered city, to a dove beating against the bars of its cage, may be to employ too poetic imagery. Strictly speaking, Dorothy and doves had but little in common; and there certainly was nothing whatever dove-like in her resentment of the seemly social ordinances, of a conservative character, by which she constantly found herself getting pulled up short.

But precisely because she entertained such views in regard to her surroundings, Mrs. Pennington Brown's disposition toward any person who, like herself, was at odds with them, was of the most cordial sort; and it was on these grounds that she had developed so suddenly a liking for Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood—who was most hopelessly at odds with her surroundings without at all knowing it. Mrs. Brown had found her very frank revelation of her socially depressed past and of her socially aspiring future quite as good as a chapter of Balzac; and she had perceived what a restfully diverting situation could be developed by giving this naïve person the identical social opportunity—the chance to meet people whom she would not like, and who would not like her—that she so ardently desired. From which partly humane, partly philosophical, motives sprang her promptly-formed determination to take Mrs. Ballingwood up.

And so it came to pass that at almost the identical moment that the object of these amiable inten-

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tions was exhibiting to her husband the bright future which was opening before her, the prospective author of that future was exhibiting her plans for its accomplishment to her elderly kinsman Mr. Hutchinson Port. Mr. Port had been dining with his agreeable niece, and the very especial burgundy—in the drinking of which, to one of his gouty habit, there was a pleasing spice of peril—had permeated his whole being with a genial glow. It is not impossible that his niece had waited for this factitious enlargement of his normally scant disposition to be obliging before she opened to him her intentions in the following terms :

“Your angel is going to give a dinner-party, Uncle Hutchinson, and she expects you to be sweet and lovely and help her to make it a success.”

The fact should be mentioned that this lady had adopted, during the animated term of her insubmission to her uncle's guardianship, the pretty conceit of referring to herself as his angel ; and the cognate fact may be stated that Mr. Port—having repeatedly tried her in her own angelic balances, and having uniformly found her wanting—entertained strong convictions as to the inadequacy of the grounds upon which this celestial pseudonym was used. Farther, an extended and bitter experience had taught him that his only safety in dealing with his energetic young relative—whose faculty for making ell's out of inches was phenomenal—resided in denying even her smallest request instantly and point blank.

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Yet on this occasion—such is the mellowing and humanizing influence of a really sound burgundy—he replied to her tentative statement in the blandest of tones: “Any dinner-party that you may give, Dorothy, necessarily must be a success provided a feature of it is this really remarkable wine. I remember perfectly when Pen laid it in. He bought it himself in Dijon, and it has been precisely sixteen years in glass. It will afford me much pleasure, however, to contribute in any way that lies in my power toward making your proposed entertainment all that you desire it to be. On second thoughts, unless your guests are to be persons of real intelligence, I would advise you not to serve this wine. One bottle might be provided for me, you know—you could tell James to place it in the basket with the label down—and for the remainder of the company you can order to be served some of Pen’s really excellent Pommard. But we can decide this point definitely when you tell me who you expect to have.”

“I’m giving the dinner to a Mrs. Ballingwood and her husband—”

“A Mrs. Balingwood? There is only one Mrs. Balingwood, now—the wife of Hector. George has not married; and their mother, you know, died last year.”

“The Mrs. Ballingwood I mean is Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood. She—”

“There is no such person,” Mr. Port struck in with great decision. “You must know that your-

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self, Dorothy. Hector Balingwood's great-grandfather had only one son—there were several daughters—and he married a Galtney. His two sons were Hector and Elisha. Hector never married, and the present Hector is Elisha's son—Elisha married Mary Bartrand. There is no connection between the Catesbys and the Balingwoods. The Catesbys are a very good family. Old John Catesby's tannery, up on Pegg's Run, was the largest tannery in the city when I was a boy. But there has been no intermarriage with the Balingwoods. This woman's husband, unless he belongs to the Virginia branch, must belong to the other family—not the Balingwoods at all. How does he spell his name—with one l, or two?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Does it make any difference?"

"It makes the greatest possible difference. If he spells it with two l's that settles matters. It would make him one of the others—and you could not have them to dinner. It is quite impossible to know those other Ballingwoods—the ones with the double l!" Mr. Port spoke with a grave energy, and the tone in which he referred to the additional letter was such as to project its unfortunate owners into a remote region of unknowableness too shocking to be defined in words.

"But she must be one of the right ones, Uncle Hutchinson. It was at Mrs. Hector Balingwood's that I met her—and she and her husband are coming, and so is that Bartrand cousin of theirs who's

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here from Colorado. I've asked the Joshua Catesbys, too."

"That does not prove anything at all. I don't know young Bartrand, but Hector Balingwood is an ass; and his wife is worse than he is, for she is not a Philadelphian. She comes of a fairly good New York family, I understand—but you know how New York people, even nice people, are. All that she thinks of is the sparkle of the passing moment. I have heard that she has said openly that she would ask a Choctaw to dinner if he could say clever things. And I know absolutely that at her house you are liable to meet people from North Broad Street, and even people"—Mr. Port's voice dropped to a tone of solemn horror—"from Spring Garden Street! No, Dorothy, Mrs. Hector Balingwood has none of that proper feeling which teaches true Philadelphians to respect their own and other people's descent. Her indorsement of anybody proves nothing at all."

"But Maria has that sort of feeling all over her, and Maria is coming too."

Mr. Port's severe manner instantly relaxed, and with a yielding suavity he answered: "That, of course, entirely changes the situation. Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse never has been known to be in error in any matter of Philadelphia genealogy. I infer from her willingness to meet these people that they do belong to the Virginia branch—in which event, of course, their standing in society is assured. Under these circumstances, Dorothy, I

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shall have much pleasure in being one of the guests at the dinner you propose giving them—and, on the whole, I think that my suggestion in regard to the burgundy had better be acted upon. The Virginian probably would appreciate it, but the young man from Colorado certainly would not—and it simply would be casting pearls before Hector Balingwood and Josh Catesby to give them such a wine. But don't forget, Dorothy, to tell James to serve my bottle with the label down."

That Mr. Port's obliging change of front had been secured by a recourse to strategy did not materially lessen the pleasure with which his ingenuous niece welcomed it. In declaring that her sister-in-law, Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse, was coming to her dinner, she had spoken prophetic truth rather than truth assured. It was her intention that Mrs. Rittenhouse should come, and she knew by extensive experience that her inborn ability to realize her intentions was large. Therefore she did not hesitate to make the argumentative assertion, as it may be delicately termed, which immediately produced so satisfactorily convincing a result.

The practical advantages of her method were obvious when dealing with Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse on the ensuing day. Mrs. Rittenhouse raised precisely the same doubts and objections in regard to these unknown Ballingwoods which had been raised by Mr. Port. But Dorothy was in a position to meet and to overcome her with precisely the tactics to which Mr. Port had yielded, and with the advan-

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tage of operating from a securely established base. In other words, she could, and did, reply that her uncle had promised to come to the dinner because in his opinion Mr. Catesby Ballingwood was one of the Balingwoods of Virginia—whereupon Mrs. Rittenhouse, whose respect for Mr. Port as an embodied Table of Philadelphia Descents was quite equal to his respect for her on like grounds—at once withdrew her objections and promised to come too. It was not badly managed, on the whole.

There was no love lost between Dorothy and her sister-in-law; but, in spite of Dorothy's tendency toward aggression, they had succeeded so far in keeping upon outwardly friendly terms. It is but just to add that the credit of their apparently amicable relations belonged wholly to the elder lady, and was bred of her imaginings as to what might be the outcome of their engaging in a regular stand-up fight. That Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse would have cast herself to the lions rather than confess that her desire for peace had anything to do with her dread of war, does not admit of a doubt; but that she would have performed this Early Christian act in an Early Christian spirit, does.

V

It was with feelings akin to those of a newly made angel joyfully trying its newly acquired wings that Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood gat her to

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the dinner-party of her hopes. So warm and buoyant was her mood that even her presentation to Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse did not appreciably chill her; and finding herself leading the procession from the drawing-room, with her hand actually on the arm of Mr. Hutchinson Port, filled her with no more than an agreeable awe. The one drop of bitterness in her cup of otherwise undiluted bliss was the threatening possibility—which Mr. Ballingwood, with a truly man-like choice of time, had revealed to her just as she was finishing dressing—that they might be compelled to return to Pittsburgh within the next fortnight. To leave Philadelphia at the very moment when her highest social hopes in that city were in course of triumphant realization, and for no better reason than that a lot of low workmen in a rolling-mill could not be kept in order by anybody but her husband, she felt would break her heart. However, she did not mean to go.

Possibly because her mind thus was directed toward rolling-mills, she seemed to associate with that branch of industry the bearded gentleman who had been presented to her in the moment before going in to dinner and whose name she did not hear. His voice certainly had a familiar sound. When they were seated, he was out of range of her eyes—his place being on Mrs. Brown's left and therefore on the same side of the table with herself, but cut off from her by Mr. Hector Ballingwood and Mrs. Josh Catesby. Somehow, this

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vaguely familiar voice, and the vague associations which it recalled, worried her. She was disturbed, too, by perceiving that her husband, seated on Mrs. Brown's right, had for his neighbor on the other side the formidable Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse; a juxtaposition in which, if the half that she had heard about this lady were true, there was peril. Diagonally facing her, seated between Mrs. Rittenhouse and Mrs. Hector Balingwood, was Mr. Josh Catesby—at whom, although her hope that so respectable a person was a relative of her husband's had been abandoned, she looked with a good deal of interest. At least, the two families had been in a way associated in the old days. But with her interest there was mingled a touch of dread. He was younger than her husband, she was glad to see; but, nevertheless, he might have an awkwardly tenacious memory. Thus, in her very first glance around the table, while unfolding her napkin, Mrs. Catesby Balingwood added one or two more tiny drops of bitterness to the brimming draught of happiness which Fate, operating through her amiable hostess, was pressing to her longing lips.

At Mrs. Pennington Brown's table conversation never flagged. Mrs. Brown not only knew how to talk herself, but she knew how to make other people talk. The unregenerate Mrs. Hector Balingwood of New York possessed the same happy subjective and objective colloquial faculties. Being seated at opposite ends of the table, these two

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sprightly ladies were so excellent a leaven that they effectually leavened the lumpishness of Mr. and Mrs. Josh Catesby, and overcame the slight awkwardness felt by Mr. and Mrs. Ballingwood upon finding themselves in so exalted a company of almost total strangers; even the frigidity of Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse thawed a little, and the taciturnity of Mr. Hutchinson Port passed unobserved.

By the time the entrées were served, the entire company—excepting the two members of it who did not mellow readily—had mellowed to a very genial cordiality; and Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood—in easy talk with her unassumable kinsman on her right and with her assumed family friend across the table, into which talk Mrs. Hector Balingwood entered with so much spirit that even Mr. Port now and then was moved to utter a word or two—had forgotten wholly her vague misgivings and was surrendered to a lively joy. At his end of the table, Mr. Catesby Ballingwood equally was enjoying himself. Mrs. Brown, discovering quickly the subject upon which he was most at home, had set him to talking about iron and iron-making—and he was talking very well indeed. He had a truly American dry humor, and some of his stories about iron-mill life were capital. The conditions of the case—the irreproachable dinner, the generous wines from the late Mr. Pennington Brown's famous cellar, the obvious interest that he inspired in his listeners—all were favorable to a glib loquac-

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ity that put the spoken word some distance in advance of the considerate thought.

Partly for this genial reason, partly because he was in ignorance of the sacredness of the rite, Mr. Ballingwood paid no attention to the solemn pause in the conversation—which his wife was quick enough to observe and to acquiesce in—when the terrapin was served. Just as though that holy chelonian had no existence (let alone a cult) he went ahead with the story that he was telling—and Mrs. Ballingwood was additionally horrified by discovering that it was the story of that picnic of the mill hands when he and the young Philadelphian, contending for her grace, had come so gallantly to blows. In a moment she found that he was telling it in the third person—and drew a long sigh of relief.

But her relief was not destined to be lasting—for this was the beginning of the end!

The story was so well told that, in spite of the flavor of sacrilege imparted to it by telling it at so sacred a juncture, a laugh went round the table as it came to an end. And then, as the laugh subsided, the gentleman seated on Mrs. Brown's left spoke out with a cheery heartiness these words of doom: "That settles it, Jack, old man. You've shaved off your beard and I've let mine grow, and we're both of us nearly fifteen years older—but you're the same man who punched my head that day, and who used to work with me at old man Mike McShane's gang of rolls!" And then, turn-

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ing to his hostess he added: "Mr. Ballingwood and I were the heroes of that occasion, Mrs. Brown; and I'm sure you've only to look at Mrs. Ballingwood—who then was Miss Polly McShane—to see that we had a heroine worth fighting for to the death!"

But this gallant speech was lost upon Mrs. Ballingwood. A sudden chill had seized her, followed by so violent a rush of blood through her veins, and so loud a ringing in her ears, that the words were indistinguishable and the voice seemed to be but a vague murmur far away. Her extreme discomposure was but momentary. As she recovered from it she heard her husband saying, in a most awkwardly constrained voice:

"—glad to see you indeed, Bartrand. You went West, I remember, from our works—I'm one of the owners now, you know—to that plant in Colorado. How do things go out there? You make a good article of iron, I know; but it comes too high to pay, don't it?"

Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse held her eye-glass to her eyes by its long tortoise-shell handle and gazed critically at Mr. Ballingwood as he spoke. Without giving him an opportunity to pursue the interesting subject of the cost of iron-making in Colorado, she said incisively: "Ah, then, it is with some of your own autobiography, Mr. Ballingwood, that you have been entertaining us so agreeably. May I ask, since you have yourself opened the subject, if you belong to the Virginia Balingwoods?"

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It is a branch of our own Philadelphia family, you know; and a very desirable branch to belong to. I have had the pleasure of meeting some members of it in the past—very charming people. They were your immediate relatives, I presume?"

"N-o-o," Mr. Ballingwood answered, with a hesitation that made his wife grind her teeth. "N-o-o, I don't belong to that family. I am a Philadelphian—at least my father and my grandfather were." And then, gathering assurance by the perceptible relaxation of Mrs. Rittenhouse's severity at the mention of a grandfather, he added: "My grandfather was a leather dealer here in old times—one of the tanneries up on Pegg's Run, you know."

Mr. Josh Catesby, seated on the other side of Mrs. Rittenhouse, leaned forward and spoke across her with a look of much interest: "You don't say so! Why, we've been in leather, my people you know, right up there for nearly two hundred years. What firm was your grandfather with? I don't remember the name of Balingwood in leather—it must have been before my day. But hold on! There was a Ballingwood in our own place in my grandfather's time, I remember perfectly. He was foreman of the currying shop, and my grandfather thought the world of him. And it seems to me that I remember hearing my grandfather—John Catesby, you know—say that there was a son or a grandson named after him. And—by Jove!—isn't your name Catesby Ballingwood? You don't mean

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to say that you're the very man named after my grandfather? Why how jolly that is—and how I wish grandfather was alive to see you! But he died, you know, ten years—”

Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse checked the eager flow of Mr. Josh Catesby's reminiscences with a stately wave of her hand. “May I ask, Mr. Ballingwood,” she said in the tone of a chief justice speaking from the bench, “how you spell your name? Is it with one l, or two?”

“Well, I believe that nowadays we most of us spell it with—with two. But I think I remember hearing my grandfather say—”

“I remember what he said better than you do, Jack—let me tell it. The dear old man was very fond of me, you know, and he has said it to me a hundred times. Let me tell it, dear!”

It was Mrs. Ballingwood who spoke—and Mr. Ballingwood could not have started more violently if the voice had come from the disintegrated terrapin. To his certain knowledge his wife never had laid eyes on his father, let alone on his grandfather; what on earth she was driving at in thus suddenly expressing a desire to tell something that she professed to know all about, when he himself was doing his best to make it up as he went along, puzzled him beyond expression; and for her to cap this most extraordinary climax by addressing him as “Jack,” in such a company, fairly set him aghast. “Go ahead, Polly,” he managed to articulate—and

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leaned back in his chair, rather more than half dazed, to await results.

Mrs. Ballingwood smiled on the company in the frankest manner and spoke in the frankest tone. "We always call each other Jack and Polly," she said; "it reminds us so pleasantly of the time when we were just comfortable common work-people—when I did the cooking and washing at home and Jack was a hand in the rolling-mill and worked on my father's gang of rolls. Jack has tried to call me Mary, and to make me call him Catesby, since we got rich—but I can't bear to let the dear old names go."

At this point in his wife's address, Mr. Ballingwood furtively pinched his right leg under the table. To his intense astonishment, his simple experiment in applied psychology convinced him that he was awake.

"I'm afraid that my father, Michael McShane, would have been a little out of place here, dear Mrs. Brown," Mrs. Ballingwood continued sweetly; "but indeed I do wish that you could have known him—he was so hearty and honest, and his Irish wit made him say such bright things. He was mother as well as father to me," there was a tender drop in her voice, "for my mother died when I was only nine years old. All that I remember about her are stories that she used to tell me about helping to feed the pigs and to take care of the cows which belonged to her father—who kept a little country store. When she died, my dear father was everything to

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me. You knew him, Mr. Bartrand, and I'm sure you don't think that I'm saying too much about his goodness?"

"Indeed you're not," Bartrand answered with a most unmistakable sincerity. "Mike McShane was one of the best fellows I ever knew."

"But you did not know old Mr. Ballingwood, Jack's grandfather. He died before you came to learn the business at the mill. He has told me over and over again, Mr. Catesby, how good your grandfather was to him—he was nothing but a currier, you know; and how proud he was that your grandfather was willing that the baby should have his name."

"Well, it worked both ways, Mrs. Ballingwood," Mr. Catesby said with a good deal of feeling, "I've often heard my grandfather say how much he thought of your husband's grandfather. As I was just saying, I wish with all my heart that the old gentleman was alive to know all about this, and to talk it over with us—it would please him right down to the very tips of his toes."

"But what Jack was just going to say," Mrs. Ballingwood went on, "was that his grandfather always impressed upon him that he must not consider himself in any way related to the nice family of Balingwoods—your family, that is, Mr. Balingwood. He said that the matter was settled absolutely because we spell the name, you know, with two l's."

As this fatal statement was made, Mr. Hutchinson Port turned his eyes upward toward outraged

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heaven, and Mrs. Logan Rittenhouse audibly moaned.

"But indeed, Mrs. Brown, I must beg that you will pardon me for inflicting upon you all this talk about ourselves. It was the pleasant surprise of meeting with Mr. Bartrand, and the interest that Mrs. Rittenhouse was kind enough to take in the spelling of the name, that set me off. Jack calls me a chatterpot, and indeed I am about the dear old times. How delicious this terrapin is, Mr. Port. I am told that you have a wonderful recipe of your own for preparing terrapin. Have you, really?"

Mr. Port was in no condition to answer this or any other question. The shock of the awful disclosure that had burst upon him had been more than he could bear. For the moment, he was completely unmanned. He tried to answer, but he could only mumble and gasp. Fortunately, his niece—as usual—was equal to the emergency. With her customary presence of mind she advanced the flagrant heresy that anybody could dress terrapin; and that no matter how they were dressed they were horrid things to eat: which assertions, in accordance with her expectation, drew forth from Mr. Josh Catesby and Mr. Hector Balingwood such indignant contradiction that some sort of a diversion was effected—and so the dinner went on.

Mr. Port and Mrs. Rittenhouse finished the meal in absolute silence; and the bearing of Mr. Catesby Balingwood — from whose possible contaminating touch Mrs. Rittenhouse carefully drew away her im-

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maculate skirts—was decidedly constrained. But Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood never had been gayer, never had seemed to be more entirely light-hearted, never had said in so short a time so many good things. With the silent exceptions noted, she fairly carried the company by storm. Finally, she neither unduly hastened nor unduly delayed her departure; she broke up the party at precisely the right time.

There was a very perceptible warmth in Mrs. Pennington Brown's manner—and neither Mrs. Brown nor her manner warmed easily—when she bade her guest good-night. Mrs. Josh Catesby's manner was more than warm, it was effusive; and she expressed her intention of calling upon Mrs. Ballingwood on the following afternoon—as that happened to be her day. Mrs. Hector Balingwood went still farther: she fairly hugged her double I'd namesake as she heartily kissed her guest good-night. A like kindly feeling was manifested by the men. Bartrand shook hands with her on the score of old acquaintance; Mr. Josh Catesby on the score of the old family friendship; and Mr. Hector Balingwood on the score of his regret that he could not claim a relationship of blood. As for her husband—who was still in a dazed condition—he was passed around from hand to hand among the members of this cordial company like refreshments on a tray. Mr. Port and Mrs. Rittenhouse, naturally, were not in the running. Like a gentlemanly priest and a very ladylike Levite, they stood, as it were, afar off from all this friendliness; and when they bade Mr.

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and Mrs. Ballingwood good-night, it was with stately bows.

When Mrs. Ballingwood fairly was gone, there was an outburst of eulogy over her frank avowal of so extraordinary a series of family facts. The men, with one exception, were in raptures over her; and the women, with one exception, gave her as nearly unqualified praise as is possible with women when speaking of their kind. It was decided with emphasis that Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood was a person who deserved to be taken up.

And just as this decision was reached in Mrs. Pennington Brown's drawing-room, the lady whom it concerned was saying to her husband in the carriage:

"—because it was the only possible thing to do! That woman was determined to get it all out of you, and the more she made you flounder the deeper you were getting in the mire. I *had* to tell.

"And now, whether you want to or not, Jack, we've got to go back to Pittsburgh—or to go somewhere—right away. All those women, the young ones, I mean, will be nice to us; and so will the men. But that old hag and that old brute won't. They hate us—and they mean to show it in every possible horrid way. I've beaten them to-night—but in the long run they'd beat me. We've got to go!" And thus did Mrs. Catesby Ballingwood withdraw from the conflict—defeated yet triumphant—carrying with her her colors and her arms.

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Yet, and justly, the hatred of Mr. Port and Mrs. Rittenhouse was poured out primarily upon Mrs. Pennington Brown—who had trampled upon the highest instincts of their natures, and by whom their considerate confidence in each other's social rectitude had been most outrageously betrayed. The bitterness of their feeling toward her, indeed, was more intense, not to say deadly, than any one born outside of Philadelphia fully can understand.

As the first of these parted from her that fateful night he said: "Dorothy, you have gone out of your way on many occasions to wound my most sacred feelings—but never before have you done anything like this. Actually, I took that woman from the Northern Liberties out to dinner on my arm!"

And the second of these, leaving her, said: "I can in part forgive you, Dorothy, for having married my unfortunate brother in order that you might murder him—but I never can forgive you for compelling me to sit through an entire dinner with those people who spell their name with two l's!"



AT THE GRAND HÔTEL DU
PARADIS



AT THE GRAND HÔTEL DU PARADIS

“**A**H, but it is I, I who penetrate the disguise of the *escroc*. Let but one of these swindling gentry come to the Grand Hôtel du Paradis, and though he came in the shape of the Sultan of the Indies, or the Shah himself, I would not be deceived. I am not dull—I!”

It was Chabassu, actual proprietor of the Grand Hôtel du Paradis, who spoke. Chabassu was seven-and-forty years old, and stout, and with a bald head and a grizzled beard. As he thus proclaimed his astuteness he looked loftily at Monsieur Polverel, the commercial traveller, and his stomach expanded with pride. Monsieur Polverel was an old friend; a good friend; one to be trusted; one to be counted upon. In his commercial travelling he stopped always at the Grand Hôtel du Paradis when he came to Marseille.

“But yes, thy cleverness is a miracle!” put in Madame Chabassu — whose body and whose voice equally were thin and sharp. “Dost thou remember the English milord?”

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"Tchut!" replied Chabassu. "That was long ago."

"And the Italian merchant of the last month?" Madame continued.

"As I was saying, Monsieur Polverel," and Chabassu turned quite away from his wife and addressed the commercial traveller—"as I was saying, the grapes are doing well this year, and we shall be sure of good wine."

Madame Chabassu paused for a moment; gave a sniff, shrill and contemptuous, and so left the room. This room was the little office of the hotel—into which Monsieur Polverel had been invited that he might drink before dinner a glass of absinthe with his host. From the kitchen, just beyond, came smells the most delicious; such smells as are to be smelt only near the kitchens of Provence. It is said that God sends meat and the devil sends cooks. But all the world knows that because the Holy Father lived so long in Avignon the devil never has been able to get into Provence at all: and so the cooks of Provence cook like angels, every one.

Monsieur Polverel, a wise man in his generation, said nothing. With a perfect air of abstraction he sipped his absinthe. Chabassu, with even greater discretion, also was silent and also sipped his absinthe. Presently its mellowing softness made all the world a calm sunshine to him, and Madame Chabassu and her aggravations faded from his mind.

Five minutes later there was a bustle outside:

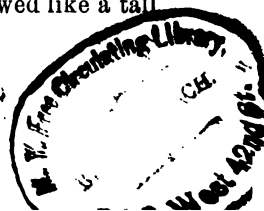
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the sound of a carriage stopping in front of the Grand Hôtel du Paradis ; of the one serving-man of the establishment running out through the hallway ; of voices. Guests were arriving—and Chabassu, still glowing with his absinthe-engendered cordiality, went out to welcome them.

They were very elegant guests whom he confronted—coming up the steps from their carriage of two horses—as he stood like a stout statue in his own doorway and handsomely bowed ; guests the like of which the Grand Hôtel du Paradis seldom had the honor to entertain. There was a grand monsieur in a long black coat, and a white waistcoat with a gold chain, and trousers of gray, and a shiny hat and shiny shoes : a dress fit for the Prefect of the Bouches du Rhône. With him was a grande dame in silk and lace, and wearing a bonnet like a whole garden of flowers.

The grand monsieur, not perceiving Chabassu—though Chabassu's stomach was directly in front of him and not six feet away—turned to the grande dame and said, seriously : “ You see, my dear, our friend Viellecourt was quite right about this Hôtel du Paradis. It makes no pretensions, but it has the air of comfort which goes with worth.”

“ Monsieur does me honor ; but monsieur is not deceived. Though I say it who should not say it, the Grand Hôtel du Paradis is of a comfort not to be found elsewhere in the whole city of Marseille.” As Chabassu spoke these words he bowed like a tall tree.



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“Bravo, my good host, you are of a piece with your hotel!” The gentleman spoke heartily. “And there is waiting for me a letter; a letter addressed to Monsieur de Saint-Mauront—is it not so?”

Chabassu was delighted. Here, truly, was a triumph over his wife. It was apropos of this very letter, which madame’s suspicions had surrounded with an atmosphere of dangerous mystery, that their discussion of the genus *escroc* had begun. But the claimants of the letter gave the lie direct to madame’s doubts. People like these were of the sort to pour money into a hotel-keeper’s pockets—not to take money out of them. Three or four guests of this order—and the fame of the Grand Hôtel du Paradis was made! Chabassu produced the letter with a flourish and a bow and handed it to Monsieur de Saint-Mauront on a plate wiped clean—and was desolated by his inability to hand it properly because the equipment of the Grand Hôtel du Paradis did not include a silver-plated tray.

Monsieur de Saint-Mauront opened the letter, and as he opened it a folded paper fluttered to the floor. He did not observe the fall of the paper, nor did the lady—who was on the other side of the room, looking with a genuine interest at the colored portrait of Chabassu done in pastel when he was in his twenty-sixth year.

“It is curious, my dear,” said Monsieur de Saint-Mauront, at the same time looking carefully inside the empty envelope; “the notary Jauffret writes that he encloses a post-office order for two

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thousand francs—the little payment still due, you know—but there is no order here.”

“Pardon,” put in Chabassu, picking up from the floor the fallen scrap of paper. “Pardon, m’sieu’, but this may be the order to which m’sieu’ refers.”

In effect, as Chabassu perceived, the paper was a post-office money-order; but neither its disappearance nor its recovery seemed to inspire its owner with the slightest concern. Carelessly stuffing it into the pocket of his white waistcoat, he thanked Chabassu in a well-bred way; but in precisely the same tone that thanks would have been given for such trifling service as the handing of a hat or the picking up of a glove.

“And now, my good man,” he said, politely, “we will look at your rooms. Be good enough to bring up the little bag. Not seeing your omnibus at the railway station, we left our luggage there until you should send for it. Here is the receipt. You may send for it while we dine.”

Chabassu took the receipt—it was for five trunks and an infinity of valises and hat-boxes: the baggage of a grand seigneur. “The omnibus shall be sent immediately,” he said; yet hesitating a little and with a slight cough. In point of fact, the omnibus of the Grand Hôtel du Paradis was not as yet a reality—it was only a distant hope. The boxes of the commercial travellers who stopped there were brought down from the railway station on a push-cart by old Michel.

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“My dear,” interposed the lady, “why bring the baggage here at all? We have all that we need for the night in the bag. The trunks would crowd us dreadfully in this little place—I mean, that is, so much baggage would be in our way even in an apartment of large size.”

“My angel,” said the gentleman, “as usual, you are right. If my yacht has come around from Naples we shall go on board in the morning. If she has not yet got in, it will be time enough, then, to bring the baggage here.” So saying, he took again the receipt and slipped it into the pocket of his white waistcoat along with the order for two thousand francs. “Lead the way,” he cried, turning briskly to Chabassu. “Let us get at once to our apartment, and then quickly to dinner—I am as hungry as a bear!”

Chabassu, leading the way up-stairs, rubbed together his two hands softly. What might not be accomplished when it came to making out the bill, even for a single night, for such guests as these?—who treated orders for two thousand francs like cigarette papers, and whose baggage would have done honor to one of the old kings of France!

And they were so affably condescending, these great people, in their praise of everything that was shown them: of the stuffy little bedroom with its two little beds; of the two arm-chairs; even of the view out of the one small window—where, positively, there was nothing to be seen but a dead-wall!

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"It is so refreshingly novel!" said Monsieur.

"It is such a charming adventure!" said Madame.

And then, together, they consulted with Chabassu about the dinner and the wines.

Chabassu was not the man to let slip so golden an opportunity. His advice was for dishes of which the very meanest cost three francs. And as for wines—it was Monsieur's wish to drink the wines of the country—Chabassu made out a little list that was a dream! With the oysters and *hors d'œuvre*, a golden Cassis, for a decade in glass; for the dinner at large, a Ledenon of fifteen years—smooth and mellow as a rich Burgundy; with the dessert, a Frontignac of a quarter of a century: and each to be charged for at the rate of a franc for every one of its years!

Therefore, with the possibilities of this dinner glowing in his mind, it was a rude shock to him when madame, the wife of his bosom, hearing his fervent account of these noble guests, and of the magnificent dinner which he was pledged to provide for them, said shortly and hotly that he was no better than a born fool! They were nothing but *escrocs*, these fine humbugs, madame declared, with a violent earnestness. The whole affair was an outrageous attempt at brazen and barefaced swindling. Should it succeed, they, the Chabassus, would be ruined, and the Grand Hôtel du Paradis would be forever a desolate waste.

"But the money-order, I myself saw it," inter-

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posed Chabassu. "The order for two thousand francs?"

"It is not a real order—and, if it were, it is in their pockets," madame answered.

"And the baggage—a dozen pieces—the baggage of a king and queen?"

"That thou didst *not* see, stupid one! It is in the moon!"

"Wait until the morning and thou wilt be convinced—even thou. Now is no time for talking. The dinner must be prepared. I myself will assist." Chabassu was an excellent cook.

"I will *not* wait until morning—while our substance is wasted in the night. What is best is to turn these swindlers this instant out of doors. Not a bite nor a sup do they get here in the Grand Hôtel du Paradis until they have paid good money in advance!" Uttering these words, madame planted herself—a statue of Determination—with her hands on her hips and her feet wide apart.

But Chabassu also could be resolute upon occasion; and, moreover, he was determined to carry this affair to a conclusion if only to demonstrate that his wife was utterly wrong.

Yet Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Mauront surely would have suffered severe indigestions could they have known how completely each morsel which they swallowed that night was saturated with a seasoning of bitter words! Fortunately, being spared this knowledge, they ate their dinner

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—which, in truth, was excellent—with a perfect satisfaction; and with even greater satisfaction drank the wines which collectively represented fifty years.

And Chabassu's spirits—notwithstanding the daggers of suspicion which were plunged into his bosom upon each of his visits to the kitchen—he was serving the dinner in person—rose steadily as the repast went on. In fact, his access of cheerfulness was due to the courtesy of his guests in making him drink with them more than one brimming glass from each of the bottles of his own old wine; in part to the comfort which he derived from their opulent talk—of their estate in Normandy, of their apartment in Paris, of their yacht. Moreover, with a perfect complaisance, they set him to talking relishingly of his own affairs—and listened with sympathy while he told them of his hopes, of his ambitions for the Grand Hôtel du Paradis in the future; of his triumphs in the past—greatest of which was the banquet once given under his roof by the Society of Commercial Travellers, when he was presented with the gold-headed cane. Full of enthusiastic memories of this glorious occasion, he brought the cane—in its case of chamois-leather—and showed it to them. Madame declared that the cane was magnificent; Monsieur that it was superb.

By the time that Chabassu served with the coffee some of his precious Armagnac—it was the treasure of his cellar: older than he was himself, and with a

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bouquet fit to make the angels lean out over the parapets of heaven and sniff with joy — his breast was all too small to hold his swelling heart! As for his wife's ignoble doubts of these most noble personages — he spurned those doubts with a generously indignant scorn.

"And now, my good Chabassu," said Monsieur de Saint-Mauront, at the same time pouring out for him a second glass of the rich Armagnac, "you must tell us what we shall find that will amuse us in Marseille to-night, and where we may sup when the evening is done"—and while he listened to Chabassu's directions, given warmly but thickly, this elegant personage lighted with elegance a Russian cigarette.

"Good!" he said, when Chabassu had finished. "Good! We shall do well. Come, my dear, let us go—and I will carry, if the excellent Chabassu will permit me, his superb cane. My own is at the station, in the bundle with the shawls."

Chabassu, overwhelmed with this condescension, expressed somewhat disjointedly his thanks.

"And, oh, my good Chabassu"—they were on the stairs as Monsieur spoke—"I must beg you to let me have a trifle of ready money. I had expected to get my post-office order cashed, but we arrived too late. Here, I will endorse it over to your name, and in the morning you can oblige me by going to the post-office and getting it cashed. A trifle will serve my purposes to-night—let us say a hundred francs."



“CHABASSU’S SPIRITS ROSE STEADILY”

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AT THE GRAND HÔTEL DU PARADIS

They were at the foot of the stairs by this time. Monsieur stepped into the little office, and in a moment had endorsed the order over to Chabassu—and almost before Chabassu had realized what he was doing he had counted out to Monsieur de Saint-Mauront five gold pieces of twenty francs, and that noble gentleman, swinging the gold-headed cane airily, together with his noble lady, had departed through the open door.

And then, in spite of the magnificence of these vanished guests, in spite of all the glasses of his own old wines and the thrilling warmth of his own old Armagnac, Chabassu suddenly was overwhelmed by a sickening dread that perhaps the suspicions of his wife might be well grounded after all! They were gone, these opulent strangers—taking with them their dinners, the wines of half a century, one hundred francs in actual money, and his precious gold-headed cane. What if the post-office order were a forgery? In that dreadful case all that remained to him of substantial indemnity was the miserable bag and Madame's laced parasol!

And then Chabassu, in his perturbation, committed a great imprudence. Going into the little smoking-room, where his wife, still lowering like a stormy sky, was exhibiting her anxieties to Monsieur Polverel, he confided to them both all that had happened, and asked for sustaining strength against his own suddenly aroused fears.

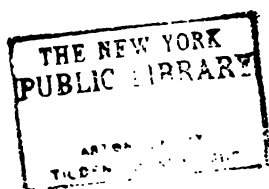
It was the very last place in the whole of the wide world to which Chabassu should have gone for such

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consolation ! Even Monsieur Polverel looked grave ; and as for madame—madame raged with the fury of two thunder - storms combined with a whole menagerie of angry wild beasts ! In terms of the most drastic severity she denounced Chabassu before Heaven as a hopeless idiot. She cried out against her own miserable weakness in marrying such an imbecile. She implored the saints to send upon him a punishment heavy enough and bitter enough to be in accord with his deserts—and in the same breath shrieked that no vengeance could fall upon him dire enough to reward him adequately for the ruin which he had wrought !

Being thrust thus harshly into such narrow shoes, Chabassu turned to Monsieur Polverel for support in his contention—though he himself had none too much confidence in it—that the post-office order was genuine. And thereupon madame faced sharply upon Monsieur Polverel and demanded his immediate adhesion to her assertion that the order was false.

Now Monsieur Polverel could depend upon Chabassu for many free glasses of absinthe and for the choicest dainties of the kitchen. Equally he could depend upon madame for the softest bed and the finest linen in the best room in the house. The position in which their contradictory appeals placed him was awkward to the last degree—but he extricated himself from it by an inspiration. One of his friends, he said, was in the money-order department of the post-office. The night was young.



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With the permission of m'sieu'-madame he would search for this friend and would bring him to examine the money-order — then, in a moment, one way or the other, their doubts would be set at rest.

Actually, Monsieur Polverel did not know a soul in any department of the post-office ; but on this specious plea he got away. At the end of an hour he sent a note by a commissionnaire telling that his friend had been sent suddenly on business of the post-office to Aix, and would not return for a week. Still another hour later, Monsieur Polverel came back to the Grand Hôtel du Paradis cautiously ; watched his chance to get in while neither Chabassu nor Madame Chabassu was near the doorway ; and then bolted straight to his room. He knew on which side of his bread was the butter, this Monsieur Polverel ! In his day and generation, as already I have said of him, he was a wise man.

Of what went on in the Grand Hôtel du Paradis between Chabassu and Madame Chabassu during the absence of Monsieur Polverel—of what went on there between them, after his unobserved return, until one o'clock in the morning, it is well to draw a veil ! After that night, Chabassu always felt that he knew how things went with the souls in purgatory ; and in the morning his very stomach seemed to have shrunk away within him, and he looked older by ten years.

But at one o'clock there had come a cessation of hostilities — with the return, the actual return, of Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Mauront. Just as

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though no storm had raged concerning them, they walked calmly into the Grand Hôtel du Paradis; said pleasantly that they had passed a pleasant evening; called for their candles; wished Chabassu good-night in the most matter-of-fact manner — and so went to their room. Also, Monsieur returned the gold-headed cane with thanks.

Chabassu's broken hopes, thus revived, rose again with a bound. He declared joyously that all was well. Madame, not in the least weakening in the vehemence of her assertion, denied that all was well — and presented the stinging suggestion that the two sharpers had not found so great an imbecile elsewhere, and so had returned to bite again the cherry into which already they had bitten so far. As there was no resolving these conflicting opinions into any sort of substantial certainty, an abandonment of hostilities was impossible. They did, however, arrive at the terms of an armed truce: Madame consented that the *escrocs*, as she persisted in calling them, should be served with their coffee in the morning. Chabassu consented that they should not be permitted to leave the house until his visit to the post-office had decided finally whether the money-order were good or bad. Uneasily the combatant parties to this agreement slept, as I may term it, on their arms.

And what was most fortunate of all—as Chabassu always said in telling the story — Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Mauront slept so late the next morning that it was after nine o'clock when they

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rang for their coffee, and more than an hour later when they came down stairs: by which time Chabassu had made his journey of dread to the post-office and had returned.

Sometimes it is the unexpected that happens.

"Certainly," said the clerk at the post-office, "this is a perfectly good money-order. Bring some one to identify you, and it shall be paid without an instant of delay. We do not put off paying money here. The Republic is not a broken bank!"

And then—having gone like a flash and returned with his friend Monsieur Perrin, an eminent wine-merchant, widely known—Chabassu had had counted out into his throbbing hand twenty crisp notes, each for one hundred francs!

It was near eleven o'clock in the morning when Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Mauront drove away from the Grand Hôtel du Paradis—after paying without a murmur the best bill for a dinner and a single night's lodging and *café-au-lait* that ever Chabassu had made out since his innkeeping began. Seated on the box of the carriage, beside the coachman, was the trig sailor who had come up from the yacht to receive Monsieur's orders. Following the carriage was a great wagon loaded with the baggage from the railway station that the sailor had attended to bringing down. It was in daylight—in broad daylight, understand—that this magnificent cortége drove away. All the street saw it; all the world saw it; the whole universe

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knew the sort of people that the Grand Hôtel du Paradis had entertained!

“And to think, imbecile that thou art, that thou shouldst have imagined these to be *escrocs*,” cried Madame Chabassu; “that but for me thou wouldst have thrust them violently from our doors!”

Chabassu was not a man who bore malice. His substantial victory sufficed him, without recrimination for a sauce. “My angel,” he answered, with a magnificent gesture, “this is a day of glory, of rejoicing; a day in the history of the Grand Hôtel du Paradis of which the record shall be made upon tablets of silver in letters of gold!”

And as Chabassu thus heroically delivered himself, his stomach visibly expanded with pride!

THE FISH OF MONSIEUR
QUISSARD



7

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I

IN all the length of the Rue Bausset—that is to say, from the Cours Belzunce straight away to the Vieux Port of Marseille: quite a distance, you understand—there was not a tongue but had its share in wagging over the case of Madame the Widow Marjoulet who kept the flourishing tobacco-shop at the corner of the Cours, and the rich huis-sier Monsieur Quissard, and that good-looking scapegrace Alceste Lamoureux who held a Lieutenant's commission in the Twenty-ninth Regiment of the Line. Remember what the wagging of a single Marseille tongue can accomplish; multiply that by a double row of tongues reaching all the way from the Cours Belzunce to the Vieux Port—and so figure to yourself the commotion!

“You will understand, Madame Vic,” said Monsieur Brisson, proprietor of the Pharmacie Centrale—stopping in the very act of pouring from the big bottle that he had taken from the shelf into the

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little bottle that he held in his left hand—"you will understand that the conduct of Madame Marjoulet is an outrage upon reason and a defiance of propriety. That she should marry with avidity the worthy Monsieur Quissard would be wisely appropriate. He is of a position, and as a fisherman he is superb." (Monsieur Brisson spoke feelingly. Without being superb, he was a fisherman himself.) "But that she should be as a shuttlecock in such a matter; and, above all, that she should conduct herself so lightly with this Lieutenant—I tell you it is a scandal which heaps upon herself and all her sex the mountains of disgrace. It would be suitable that the wrath of heaven should descend upon her in flames of fire!" And Monsieur Brisson simulated the descent of fire from heaven by raising above his head and then suddenly lowering again the bottles which he held in his hands.

"Pooh!" answered Madame Vic, with a contemptuous airiness. "If you men had the management of the wrath of heaven there soon wouldn't be a woman left alive in the world!" And then, more seriously, she went on: "Poor soul! As if all in a moment she could decide between reason and love! What you say, Monsieur, is unjust, is absurd. She is an angel of innocence martyred by scandalous tongues!"

Madame Vic spoke with asperity. She herself had made a marriage of reason with Monsieur Vic, the well-to-do baker, who was old enough to be her father. It was for his use that the little bottle was



M. QUISSARD

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being filled. Madame Vic was a forehanded woman who looked ahead and thought about consequences. She was not a person to sow dragon's teeth by pronouncing too harsh an opinion upon a case that presently might be her own.

"And as to this huissier," she continued, "you know as well as I do, Monsieur, that there are stories about him. It is hinted, sometimes, that he is not really rich at all. It is more than hinted that if he is rich he has not gathered his money with clean hands. He is a dark man, and mysterious. Even these fish which he brings home—I will not say that he catches—are mysteries. Always large fish. Always not less than five, often seven—a very prodigy of a catch; as you, who are a fisherman yourself, very well know. Frequently you fish for a whole day and catch nothing. When you catch a single fish, even a small fish, you are justly proud of your skill. When you come home you tell us where you caught your fish, and how; and you show it to us in various positions, and are pleased to have us take it in our hands—because you are a brave and skilful fisherman, Monsieur, and because you are an honest man!"

Monsieur Brisson stopped in his work of tying a piece of red paper over the cork of the little bottle and made Madame Vic a handsome bow.

"But when Monsieur Quissard comes home at night with such a collection of fish as would make the blessed Saint Peter himself turn green with envy, what does he do? Does he tell us where he

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caught them, save in a way so vague that it is no telling at all? No. Does he do more than raise the lid of his basket and permit us to peep in at them? No. Is any one ever suffered to take them in hand and examine them? No. And is all that the way of an honest fisherman? No! I tell you a thousand times, no! Were those seven fish the seven deadly sins I leave it to you if he could make much more of a mystery of them. And on my conscience, Monsieur," said Madame Vic briskly in conclusion, mixing her terms a little but leaving her meaning quite clear, "Madame Marjoulet will do well to have none of him, for I believe that if the truth were known he has committed them all!"

Monsieur Quissard, it must be remembered, occupied a responsible position in the community. Whatever people might choose to think about him privately, only a woman with a loosely hung tongue would venture thus to treat publicly of his possible shortcomings in such unguarded terms. Monsieur Brisson, who also occupied a responsible position in the community, had no desire to commit himself in plain words to Madame Vic's extreme opinions; yet was he mollified by her generous estimate of his skill as a fisherman and of his honesty as a man; and, moreover, the exasperating success of his rival in fishing could not but rankle a little in his soul. Weighing these several considerations one against the other, he answered her lively outburst expressively, yet guardedly, by a simultaneous ele-

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vation of his eyebrows and shoulders and out-thrust of his elbows from his sides. But his only spoken words were, as he handed her the little bottle, neatly wrapped in green paper and tied with a red string: "The price, madame, is thirty-two sous."

"Thirty-two sous for no more than that!" cried Madame Vic. "It is no wonder that you pharmaciens grow rich! To be a baker is another thing!"

"Quite!" answered Monsieur Brisson dryly. "In *our* business it is necessary to give honest weight."

"Honest weight, indeed!" cried Madame Vic—it was a tender point that Monsieur Brisson had touched upon. "Honest weight! That is excellent! But, at least, all the old women in the world may eat of what *we* sell and not die in agonizing pains!" And having discharged this Parthian dart—whereof the venom was the reference to that unfortunate mistake in the making up of a prescription which had cast so black a shadow over the fortunes of the Pharmacie Centrale—Madame Vic clapped down the thirty-two sous on the brass scales with an angry rattle, and as she went out jerked to the shop door behind her with such energy that she set the little bell above it to jingling in a very devil's dance.

Monsieur Brisson was equal to the emergency. Opening the door just wide enough to thrust out his head, he called after her: "Madame must wait upon the course of nature. Her bottle is not dead—

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ly. Mistakes of that sort rarely happen where they are most desired!"—and then drew in his head and closed the door so quickly that Madame Vic's answer struck harmlessly against the glass. It was one of those rare occasions when the man had the last word.

On the whole, the case had not been fairly stated. To say, as Monsieur Brisson said, that the conduct of the widow Marjoulet in the matter of the huis-sier and the Lieutenant was an outrage upon reason and a defiance of propriety was to say too much. But to say, as Madame Vic said, that the widow Marjoulet was an angel of innocence martyred by scandalous tongues was to say too little—too little by far. Indeed, the major premise of Madame Vic's proposition was a high defiance of probability. To be of an innocence, one cannot also be a widow, and two-and-thirty, and the keeper of a *débit de tabac*, and—least of all—a Marseillaise.

Between the extremes occupied by the druggist and the bakeress lay the truth. It was much more accurately set forth by Monsieur Petot, proprietor of the favorably known barber shop "Au Panthéon des Coiffeurs," around the corner in the Cours. He was of a meditative and sententious habit, this Petot—characteristics which made him a marked man in his city and in his craft—and his pithy utterances, usually arranged in the form of a series of argumentative questions developing a logical conclusion, rarely failed to hit the mark. It was according to this formula, and while in the act of

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shaving Monsieur Peloux the notary, that he delivered himself in the premises.

“From a point of view, what could a well-to-do widow find better than a young Lieutenant?” he asked.

Monsieur Peloux, over whose upper lip the lather was being spread at that moment, did not attempt a reply.

“And from a point of view,” continued the barber, “what could a young widow find better than a huissier who already is rich and who begins to be old?”

As the lathering process still was going forward, Monsieur Peloux still was unable to answer. But then, to so simple a statement of self-evident fact, no answer was required.

“Being precisely a widow,” Monsieur Petot went on, as he relinquished the brush for the razor, “how can Madame Marjoulet carry herself to a choice?”

Monsieur Peloux shook his lathered chin hopelessly. It was too much for him.

“And therefore,” concluded the barber, at the same time seizing the notary’s nose and beginning a series of long clean sweeps with his razor across the notary’s cheek, “she temporizes; and is of a far too encouraging tenderness with them both!”

Simply, then, it was Madame Marjoulet’s over-amiability in encouraging both of her suitors, because of the difficulty that she found in deciding between their nicely balanced claims, that had caused

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Monsieur Brisson to condemn her conduct as outrageous; and that had caused Madame Vic (though also that she might thus vicariously defend the rights of her own unachieved but budding widowhood) to declare her to be an angel of innocence, martyred by scandalous tongues.

II

In truth the problem which presented itself to Madame Marjoulet was as delicate a one as ever a widow was called upon to solve: and Heaven knows that many and difficult are the problems which beset every widow's way.

Even on the broad lines stated by Monsieur Petot—love and a competence on the one side, on the other riches and a rational esteem—the choice was among nettles; but when all its inner details and difficulties were considered it was nothing less than a bush of thorns. For Madame Marjoulet had to put into the scale with love the possibility that the Lieutenant's aunt might not only die opportunely but also might leave him the pretty estate with the good vineyards in the valley of the Durance: an enchanting combination of improbabilities which would enable her to snap her fingers at the huissier's fortune, no matter how great it might be. Into the scale with reason she had to put the grave doubts which at times beset her as to whether the huissier really had any fortune whatever, great or small.

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Against both her suitors together she had to weigh the loss—which necessarily would follow her marriage with either of them—of her official position as a vendor of tobacco under government: and the fact must be remembered that in France a handsome widow who keeps a tobacco-shop is in effect an uncrowned queen. And all of these balancings were complicated by her knowledge that love might have its way without bringing actual poverty in its train. Her dot had been a fair one; she had made tidy savings during her eight years of tobacco-selling; she had inherited a little shop on the Rue Saint-Ferréol—the principal shopping street in Marseille—and was about to convert it into a big and handsome and well-paying shop by the judicious investment of her portion and her savings in the purchase and improvement of a tumble-down adjoining property. Therefore, the Lieutenant also having his pay and a little beside, there was no great probability that love would have to leave by the window because poverty came in by the door. Yet whenever she had followed out this enticing line of thought—which usually was several times a day—she would find herself thinking at the end of it: “But if the huissier really is so very rich—and already close to sixty—will not that be better still?” And then she would sigh deeply and go over it all again from the start.

Truly, then, the problem was as delicate a problem as ever a widow was called upon to solve. It is much for a strong man to stand up and affront a

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single fate. Such a man must have courage and nerve. But here was Madame Marjoulet, a weak woman, standing up and affronting a hydra-headed destiny that came dashing at her with all its heads down!

The more that she pondered upon this distracting situation the more was she convinced that an adjustment of its conflicting claims only could be effected by penetrating the veil of mystery that enveloped all the realities of the huissier's life in a sombre haze. Within reason, such concealment could not be objected to. About all huissiers there is more or less of mystery — 'tis a part of their stock in trade. But in the case of Monsieur Quissard it was in excess of the normal and decidedly more than the needs of his trade required.

By his own assertion and by common report she knew that he was very rich. But she also knew (aside from the fact that he notoriously neglected his business in order to go upon his fishing expeditions) that his reputation for veracity was such as habitual fishing produces, and that common report is a common liar — perhaps even more so in Marseille than elsewhere. Moreover, she had heard, even as Madame Vic had heard, the undercurrent of whisperings that his riches were but the riches of a dream. These doubts were disconcerting; these whisperings, if truth lay at the bottom of them, were absolutely subversive of her plans. In the huissier's wealth (of which the probable availability was increased by his somewhat advanced

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years) lay his only claim upon her consideration. Her marriage with him would be as strictly of convenience as, on the other hand, her marriage with the Lieutenant would be of love. But should he prove to be a gilded sepulchre of a huissier; should her loss of love not be compensated by a gain of gold—then indeed would her marriage of reason be but a dreary harvesting of the fruit of the Dead Sea!

Oddly enough — though perhaps it was merely the working in both of them of the same feminine intuitive processes—Madame Marjoulet was at one with Madame Vic in linking the mystery of the huissier's miraculous draughts of fishes with the deeper mystery which surrounded his real or supposed miraculous draughts of substantial wealth. In each case the verity of his success rested mainly upon his own assertion; in neither was the result exhibited with a convincing clearness; in both a far franker line of treatment greatly was to be desired. Pondering upon these matters, Madame Marjoulet eventually came to believe that could the secret of his success as a fisherman be penetrated such light would be thrown upon his life at large that there would be no need for her longer to hesitate in her choice.

Assuredly it was not for lack of endeavor on her part that the mystery remained unsolved. Rarely did a day go by that she did not, quite by accident, walk past Monsieur Quissard's dwelling — which fronted upon the Pavé d'Amour and had an end

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upon the Rue Bausset—the while casting searching sidewise glances upon its trim exterior and sniffing tentatively: as though through the close-drawn blinds which veiled its windows, or through its very walls, she would drag forth its secret; or, at least, in the odor of cooking fish, would surprise a portion of that secret in a telltale smell. And not a week went by that she did not make one or more attempts to wring the secret from the huissier himself—whose exterior also was trim, and whose blinds were very closely drawn indeed.

As for the house, it was of the same reticent respectability as the houses of all the other huissiers in France. The paint always was fresh, the well-laid stone walls always had the look of a recent washing, behind the always-shining glass of the windows the neatly drawn curtains always were immaculate, the bell-pull and the door-knob shone always like burnished gold. And with these several characteristic touches was also that obvious air of secretiveness which enables one at a glance to distinguish the house of a huissier from all other houses, and so renders quite unnecessary the trig oval sign set at an angle over the door. From that politely repellant exterior absolutely no information was to be obtained. Of the smell of fish, even on Fridays, there was not a suggestion. If the place smelt of anything—but here reality is superseded by metaphor—it was of shrewd legal settlements behind closed doors, of cleverly manipulated private contracts, of well-adjusted bank-

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ruptcies ; of all the grist, in short, which comes to a huissier's mill and which is taken good account of without beat of drums.

Indeed, the merest glance at Monsieur Quissard—who was of a compact rather than a lean habit, and whose self-contained look was emphasized by the close-drawn lines of his mouth and also by the close set of his neat black clothes—would have satisfied anybody that drum-beating was not in his line. He was one of those rare men (and most rare in Provence) who understand why their teeth are set outside their tongues, and who utilize that safeguard against indiscreet utterance with which nature has endowed them. Yet was his reticence of that fine (and paradoxical) sort which is liberal enough with mere words. What this intelligent huissier kept to himself were his facts and his thoughts.

Madame Marjoulet, who was endowed with a full share of womanly curiosity, found his imperturbable impenetrability little short of maddening. So heavily did his secret prey upon her that she actually, at times, was eager to marry him simply that she might find it out. The feeling on the part of her sex about mysteries has been that way from Bluebeard's time down.

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III

“Monsieur has been fishing again ? And has had, as always, the great success ?”

It was Madame Marjoulet who spoke—the huis-sier, carrying his rod and basket, had stopped in to get his usual little package of *scaferlati-ordinaire* for his pipe—and she spoke in the tone of cheerful friendliness that implied a kindly wish to know the whole story ; whereof the telling, to a Frenchman who really has caught a real fish, is so exquisite a joy.

“ Ah, well, it is not so bad, this to-day’s sport,” Monsieur Quissard answered, airily. “ I have seven fellows here in my basket—and none of them precisely small.”

“ Seven !” cried Madame Marjoulet admiringly. “ It is a prodigy, it is a miracle, this success that attends you always ! But yesterday, Monsieur Brisson fished for the whole day long and caught only one—and so little that you might have hidden it in your hand. Monsieur will show me his fish ?”

It was notable that in her conversations with the huissier her form of address—she herself could not have accounted for it—would be in one breath familiar and in the next formally polite.

“ Madame does me an honor. Will she be good enough to look ?” Yet, while uttering these words of politeness, Monsieur Quissard so placed himself that when he opened the basket his own body was

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between it and the light; nor was the lid entirely raised. As the day was waning, this arrangement did not tend to make the exhibition a very complete one; yet Madame Marjoulet, bending over the counter and peering into the basket, did see within it what had every appearance of being a fine mess of fish. She reached forward her hand quickly—but more quickly Monsieur Quissard drew the basket away.

“Madame must not soil her charming hand,” he said gallantly. “It is the misfortune of fish that their smell is vile. I myself, whose hands already are corrupted by this ill odor, shall have the pleasure of showing her one.” And with these words Monsieur Quissard, stepping back a little, drew forth a fish from the basket and held it up before her by its gills. But as he held it away from her, instead of toward her, more than half the width of the shop intervened between this object and Madame Marjoulet’s eyes. Against the waning light it was a mere silhouette. Yet it certainly was a fish; and, moreover, it was a noble fish—at the least, twenty centimètres long. “It is, of course, only a small fish,” said Monsieur Quissard with a modestly depreciative air.

Perhaps unreasonably, Madame Marjoulet was not satisfied. She fairly itched, indeed, to settle the matter definitely by a dash around the counter that would enable her to lay convincing hands upon that mysterious leviathan. Politeness made this vigorous line of action impossible. She therefore

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temporized. "Magnificent!" she cried. "He must be weighed, this noble fish. Monsieur will place him here on the scales."

At these words Monsieur Quissard visibly shuddered. Madame Marjoulet fancied that he grew pale. There certainly was a trembling in his voice as he answered sharply, in the same moment returning the fish to the basket and clapping down the lid: "Impossible!"

For a moment there was awkward silence. Then the huissier spoke; but lamely, and with the confused air of one who has escaped from peril by a narrow chance. "It—it is impossible, I mean, to think of weighing fish in madame's scales. They would become corrupted by the smell. The delicate flavor of the tobacco which she afterward would weigh in them would be spoiled."

"It is conceivable that a piece of paper might be placed upon the scale," Madame Marjoulet answered dryly. "And the smell of these fish," she added with a touch of sarcasm, "must be positively horrible!"

"It—it is bad luck to weigh fish," almost pleaded the huissier.

Madame Marjoulet was too astute a woman to press a point that obviously could not be carried; and too considerate of her own general line of policy not to extricate the huissier from the difficulties in which she had involved him. With a little sigh, wrung from her by her powerlessness, but also with a most winning smile, she said cordially: "Ah, if

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to weigh it is to endanger Monsieur's luck, the thing is not to be thought of. To trifle with such luck would be unpardonable. Monsieur is the most fortunate of men!"

Monsieur Quissard essentially was an opportunist. This prettily turned speech very evidently relieved him from a serious embarrassment. Yet even in the tense moment of his deliverance from imminent danger was he keen enough to perceive its farther advantageous possibilities, and quick enough to seize them. Taking off his basket—which seemed to be too much of a Pandora's box for his immediate purposes—he advanced again to the counter. "Not the *most* fortunate of men!" he said with much meaning and even quite a touch of tenderness in his tone.

"But yes," answered Madame Marjoulet, with an air of excellently childlike innocence. "Monsieur is unreasonable. What more—being already rich and prosperous—can he desire?"

"This!" said Monsieur Quissard, and he clasped in both of his the widow's hand.

Really, it was very well done. There were dramatic possibilities in Monsieur Quissard.

Madame Marjoulet, having satisfied herself by a quick glance at the shop-window that no inquisitive eyes were peering in upon her, suffered her hand to remain, temporarily, in Monsieur Quissard's keeping. "Monsieur always will have his little joke," she said pleasantly.

"Madame knows that this is no joke," answered

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the huissier. And then, speaking very earnestly, he went on : "Let us come now to an understanding. You know the affection that I entertain for you ; and you, I think, have at least an esteem for me. But we will not speak of that. We will look at the matter only on the side of reason. That is the better spirit—since we no longer are precisely young."

Monsieur Quissard's usual discretion was not shown in this deliverance. But Madame Marjoulet restrained her natural inclination to tell him that she did not regard herself as being conspicuously superannuated, and he continued : "As you know, I am a prudent man, and capable in affairs. I have my own property—not a small property, I may even say a large property—which I manage well. You also have a property : and, you perceive, I could manage it with my own and with the same skill ; much better, you understand, than you can manage it yourself."

"My property?" put in Madame Marjoulet. "Pooh, it is nothing!"

"Surely," exclaimed Monsieur Quissard, with a note of anxiety suddenly perceptible in his tone, "you own the shop in the Rue Saint-Ferréol?"

"But the size of it, Monsieur—it is as that!" And the lady held the middle finger of her disengaged left hand at a most minute distance from her thumb, and accompanied this expressive gesture with a similarly belittling shrug.

"Ah, but madame does not perceive the possibilities," the huissier said eagerly. "Being a wom-

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an, she cannot be expected to understand such large matters. But I am a man, I, and it is for me to show her; to expound. Truly her shop is small; but it is upon a corner, and the house adjoining it is so poor and so old that madame can buy it for a song. And then of the two together we can make such a shop that it will be as a mine of gold! It is for me to attend to, the making of that fine affair — when madame gives me this, which truly will make me what she just now said I was: the happiest of men!" And Monsieur Quissard supplemented this gallant conclusion of his speech by raising gallantly to his lips the hand that still rested in his own.

It was a prettily arranged demonstration of affection, but Madame Marjoulet scarcely was disposed to accept it at its face value. The business note at the beginning was too sharply insisted upon to give the sentimental note at the end free play; and, also, she was ruffled by having presented to her as a project the very plan that she was in the act of executing with a circumspect secrecy. Moreover, the sudden deepening of the mystery which enshrouded Monsieur Quissard's fishing caused her an anxiety that almost amounted to alarm.

But even under these new conditions she still was not inclined to speak in either direction the final word. Therefore she compromised the situation by answering in her most charming manner and with one of her most charming smiles: "Monsieur knows the saying, 'a woman has two minds,

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but a widow has ten'—and it is clear that to decide them all in the same way must take a long time. And Monsieur also knows that other saying, 'you cannot hurry a woman, a cat, or a cow.' And now indeed Monsieur must go. He has staid too long already. It is almost dark. People will talk. They will utter scandals. Absolutely, Monsieur must go without another word!" And as Madame Marjoulet withdrew her hand and at once set about lighting up the shop for the evening, there was nothing for it on the side of the huissier but to obey her command.

But he went away jubilant. Not being able to see into the secret soul of Madame Marjoulet he knew nothing of the freshly aroused doubts and dreads which rankled there; nor could he imagine the practical purpose that had underlaid her willingness to let him hold her hand—and that manifested itself in her eagerly interrogative sniffing at her fingers the very moment that his back was turned.

Yet the practical outcome of that purpose was so astounding that she grew perceptibly pale, and her breath came quick and short, almost in gasps. Monsieur Quissard twice had referred to the corrupting odor of his fish, and otherwise had insisted upon the strong vileness of that odor in emphatic terms. He had handled one of these fish in her presence; and, presumably, he had handled them all. For five minutes at least he had held her hand in his. There was not about her hand the faintest suggestion of a fishy smell!

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IV

During all of that evening, and during the whole of the ensuing day, the troubled soul of Madame Marjoulet moved fearsomely in a fish-haunted maze. The vague yet portentous bodings which she long had harbored deep in the recesses of her inmost consciousness as to the verity of these strange fish of Monsieur Quissard's avowed catching seemed suddenly to be realized—for who could believe in a fish that had no smell! And yet, being a woman, she strenuously denied to herself her own convictions; and was more than usually disposed, should occasion offer, to champion the huissier's success with his rod.

Late in the afternoon, with the appearance of the Lieutenant, the occasion did offer; indeed, Madame Marjoulet created it—for she so longed to unburden herself of the matter uppermost in her mind that she lost no time in telling him about the magnificent fish which Monsieur Quissard had caught on the preceding day.

“Bah!” said the Lieutenant, contemptuously. “They are of a trickery, those fish, from first to last. They are not real fish. To be real, they would have to be bought—and that old grip-sous would not spend his money even to deceive you.” And, having thus delivered himself, the Lieutenant lighted gracefully the expensive *cigarette russe* which he had just purchased (two francs, the box

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of twenty-five), and looked at the widow with an air.

The point that he had made, as they both knew, was a strong one. The huissier notoriously was close-fisted. Even in his dealings with Madame Marjoulet—where he reasonably might be expected to put his best foot foremost—his habit was to buy in the course of the week no more than a hectogramme of *scaferlati-ordinaire* for his pipe; and his greatest extravagance, now and then of a Sunday, was a package of *cigarettes caporal* at fifty centimes. The contrast with the Lieutenant—who bought *cigarettes russes* habitually, and even at times (for francs 3.80) boxes of ten small cigars—was as the contrast between night and day.

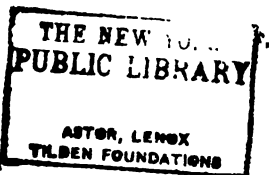
“Bah!” repeated the Lieutenant, in a tone of still more profound contempt. “These fishes are the fishes of a dream!”

“How easy is it,” observed Madame Marjoulet, “for envy to depreciate superior skill!” The Lieutenant was seated in front of the little counter; Madame Marjoulet was standing behind it. As she delivered this abstract moral reflection she looked quite over his head out through the shop window and diagonally across the Cours at the roof of the Hôtel de Provence. It was as though he were not there at all. To so disconcerting a reception of his utterances the Lieutenant was at a loss to formulate a reply.

Madame Marjoulet leaned forward, resting her enchantingly plump elbows upon the counter and



“‘BAH!’ REPEATED THE LIEUTENANT.”



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framing her most provoking face in her two little white hands. This brought her eyes—they were very bright and very black eyes—on a level with the Lieutenant's; but instead of being directed upon him they continued to range past him at the roof of the Hôtel de Provence. "And how easy is it," continued Madame Marjoulet, abstractedly, "to deny that in which we do not wish to believe!"

She dropped one hand upon the counter and busied herself in arranging with a still greater accuracy the neat pile of little squares of brown paper lying ready for the sale of scaferlati at the rate of one sou the décagramme; the sort of purchase affected by Monsieur Quissard. The result of this slight change of position was to put her charming head a trifle sidewise on her left hand—and a face like Madame Marjoulet's tipped a little from the perpendicular becomes absolutely a distraction—and at the same time to advance the hand that was arranging the squares of brown paper quite close to the Lieutenant's shoulder. And Madame Marjoulet's red lips were a little pursed together with an expression most tantalizingly demure.

After all, an officer of the French Infantry is a human being, not a statue of stone. And even a statue of stone, under those circumstances, would have gone to no very miraculous lengths had it suddenly seized the hand on the counter and at the same time bent forward quickly toward those very red lips. Certainly this was precisely what

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was done by the Lieutenant—who also exclaimed: “I adore thee, Denise!”

Doubtless the Lieutenant was an adept in the tactics of infantry; but Madame Marjoulet could give him points in the tactics of love. It was as though his clasp upon her hand had touched a spring. Instantly she was standing quite erect on the remote side of the counter with her lips hopelessly far away. And then, her position being entirely secure, she broke into a laugh. However, it was a friendly laugh—and the Lieutenant still held her hand.

“Really,” cried Madame Marjoulet, “the impudence of these soldiers is past all belief.”

“Denise,” said the Lieutenant, his voice trembling a little, “I adore thee!”

“But their conversation,” continued Madame Marjoulet, speaking in a highly judicial tone, “is of a monotony. Their ideas are few. They painfully repeat themselves. It was but a moment ago, Monsieur, that you uttered actually the same words—and even then, if I mistake not, the remark was not precisely new.”

“Thou wouldst torment me to death, Denise. And indeed,” added the Lieutenant very miserably, “it were better than such a life that I should die!”

“Monsieur would employ poison?”

“I care not what I employ—so that it be quick.”

“Because, if it is to be poison, our friend Monsieur Brisson can manage the matter so that there

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will be no scandal, no noise. He will make the mistake with the prescription, as in the case of the old woman, and all will be decently arranged. Will Monsieur attend to this little matter now? The shop of Monsieur Brisson, as he knows, is only a single step away."

"Thou hast no heart. Yes, I will attend to that little matter now." The Lieutenant's voice fairly broke. As he rose, and would have drawn his hand away, his face was pitifully sad. There was a misty look about his eyes.

But Madame Marjoulet detained his hand, and with a gentle pressure that was inexpressibly comforting. "They are such children, these soldiers!" she said. "They are so easily hurt if one ventures in the least to make fun of them. Really, with such babies, it is hard to know how one must behave!" Her words, decidedly, were mocking. But they no longer were stinging, and there was a perceptible note of tenderness in her tone. Her eyes, of a sudden, had grown both brighter and softer, as though they were more than usually moist. The Lieutenant, standing and holding her hand, drew close to the counter and leaned forward. This time Madame Marjoulet did not draw away. The hand that was held prisoner trembled a little, and she uttered a very faint sigh.

But if, as seemed probable, a crisis just then were impending the sudden opening of the shop door cut it short. On the instant, the two clasped hands flew apart as though they had bitten each other;

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the Lieutenant was standing as stiff as he would have stood to salute a general of division; and as for Madame Marjoulet, all that the person who entered the shop saw of her—until she turned to attend to his demands—was her back, as she stood behind the counter arranging the boxes of matches on the shelves.

A tobacco-shop in the Cours Belzunce is the last place in the world in which to look for privacy. It was only by chance that they had had five minutes together alone. More people came in—a stream of people. As a strategic base for love-making assault the position became untenable. Retreat was a necessity. With a high resolve filling his soul, and with a look in which were whole volumes of unuttered affection, the Lieutenant retired from the field.

As the shop door closed behind him Madame Marjoulet sighed deeply. It was a sigh half of relief, half of regret. “Ah,” she said to herself, “I must keep a better guard. In another moment all would have been lost!”

And then Madame Marjoulet sighed still more deeply—as though she regretted that so much had been saved!

V

The high resolve that Lieutenant Lamoureux brought away in his soul from Madame Marjoulet's tobacco-shop was that he would crush the huissier as he would crush a worm. This simile, he felt,

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was unjust to the worm. The huissier was of a villainess beyond worms. But while despicable, he also was dangerous. His mysterious success as a fisherman was such a provocative to curiosity that a woman might go to any lengths to resolve into certainty her longing wonder. His reputed riches were a bait to reason so tempting that, while powerless to command affection, they very well might tempt a woman into marriageable esteem. For himself, the Lieutenant believed in neither fish nor riches. To him the huissier simply was a masked villain. The crushing process upon which he was resolved was the tearing away of the villain's mask.

But Jove does not lend his thunder-bolts to Cupid merely for the asking, and this fine project was far from running on wheels.

"He is protected by the devil in person, this huissier," said the Lieutenant, speaking in hollow tones to Monsieur le Capitaine Gontard and regarding that friend of his bosom with despairing eyes.

"It is reasonable," answered the Captain Gontard meditatively. "A huissier and the devil are of the same breast."

"To prove that his strong-box is empty," continued the Lieutenant, "is impossible. I cannot see into that strong-box any more than I can see into the black depths of his foul heart. What then do I do? Of a necessity, I turn myself to his fishings. I play the spy upon him, I! But what do I find? Nothing! At all points he is armed. Before he departs upon his fishings he shows to five

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people at the least that his basket is empty, and that his leather sack has in it only food. Then he goes to the water. A single step aside on his way from the Pavé d'Amour to the Vieux Port would carry him into the fish-market—and then his perfidy would be clear. But, positively, he steps aside in the other direction and goes to his boat and comes from it again through the Cannebière—and even his friend the devil cannot raise up fish for him from the stones of the busiest street in Marseille !”

“But upon the water,” questioned the Captain Gontard. “What happens there?”

“Upon the water,” answered the Lieutenant gloomily, “it is worse than upon the land. He takes his boat at the Vieux Port, himself rowing it, and goes toward the islands. In another boat I pursue. He disappears beyond the Château d’If. When I pass the Château d’If and see him again his boat is at anchor near the Île de Ratoneau. But is he fishing? No, he is reading a newspaper! I dare not approach myself closely to him. He knows me, and he would perceive that I am following him as a spy. I wait an hour. I wait two hours. I see nothing. He does not fish. No other boat comes near him from which he could buy fish. The only boat in sight is a big felucca off on the horizon that remains at rest. It is useless, my spying. I come back to the land. Yet, later, he returns with fish—huge fish. He goes with them to the Cours Belzunce, to Madame Mar-

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joulet. He raises a little the lid of his basket and shows them to her. But he will not permit her convincingly to handle them, nor will he tell her clearly how his fish were caught. Therefore the fire of curiosity devours her soul. I know well what must be the conclusion of this matter: she will marry him so that she may penetrate his secret to its bones. And then," concluded the Lieutenant in the calm tone of desperation, "I shall end all by blowing out my brains! Indeed, why should I not blow them out now?"

"Let us go," said the Captain Gontard soothingly, "and have together an absinthe."

This kindly suggestion was fortunate. It conserved the Lieutenant's brains within his skull, where they reasonably belonged, and so gave him an opportunity for using them to such good purpose that only two days later he came again to his friend with the light of triumph in his eyes. His advent was as tumultuous as that of a whirlwind.

"I beheld him through a telescope, and now I know all!" he cried with exultation as he dashed in upon the Captain Gontard. "Come with me instantly. There is not a moment to lose. Even now he is at her door!"

The Captain Gontard was smoking his pipe at his ease, while he engaged himself with the latest number of the *Journal Amusant*. Upon being addressed in a fashion so impetuous and so incoherent his immediate conviction was that this unfortunate lover had gone mad.

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"No, I am not mad," said the Lieutenant sharply, in answer to his friend's look of concern and alarm. "It is that I have penetrated this dark treachery. All is revealed. I have the huissier in my two hands. I go now to crush him in the very presence of the adorable woman whom he has dared to love. Thou must come with me. Hurry! hurry!" And as he spoke he snatched down from the pegs on which they were hanging the cap and sword of the Captain Gontard; clapped the one upon his head and thrust the other into his hands; and then fairly dragged him out from the room and down the stairs and into the carriage that was waiting below. In a moment they were rattling away with violence toward the Cours Belzunce.

"I will tell to thee now the whole matter clearly," said the Lieutenant as they dashed along. "I will envelop myself in a calmness and explain. It is in this way that all occurs: The huissier goes out toward the islands in a boat. In another boat I follow as before. When I am upon the battlements of the Château d'If—"

"Upon the battlements of the Château d'If in a boat? Impossible!" interrupted the Captain Gontard. It was evident to him that his friend was as mad as a March hare. His distress was profound.

"Animal!" retorted the Lieutenant angrily, "I said nothing about a boat. Do not now annoy me with thy foolish words. Being come, I say, upon the battlements of the Château d'If, I adjust my telescope and direct it upon the huissier. I regard

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him with all my eyes. It is as though he were no farther away than the length of my arm. He does not fish. He reads interminably his newspaper, *Le Petit Marseillais*. Later, he examines documents which he takes from his pocket, and now and then makes notes in a little book. It is as though he had brought the business of his rascally office out upon the sea.

“The time goes on. It is one hour that I watch. It is two hours. It becomes more. I am in pain of hunger for my breakfast. And my pain is made a million times worse by seeing the huissier eating there his breakfast before my eyes. From his leather bag he brings out all manner of excellent things—sausages of Arles, black olives in oil, a whole cold fowl, a pâté in a box, a huge mass of bread, a great bottle of wine, and even fruit at the end. Figure to yourself my state as I gaze—I who am starving! As I look through the telescope these good things are within my reach. I can touch them with my hand. I fancy, even, that I can smell their delicious smell, and that I can hear the ravishing gurgle of the wine! But they are infinitely far away! And because of my oath I dare not descend from the battlements in search of food. I dare not for so much as a moment turn away. I—”

“Because of what oath?”

“The oath of which all along I have been telling thee, imbecile that thou art! My oath that not for one single instant will I lose sight of the

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huissier until he shall come again to his own door. Cease thy interruptions, or I shall never have done. Thy stupidity is beyond a dream !

“He continues to eat, that vile huissier, for years—for ages! I draw my belt tighter and demand strength from my soul. When at last he finishes his gorgings he restores to the leather bag the fragments of his feast and lights his pipe. For the moment, I am saved—I remember my cigarettes! With the smoking of cigarettes I allay a little the pains of my agonized stomach, while I continue to observe. I fancy that perhaps he now may fish. But he does not fish. He takes again the papers and the little book from his pocket, and as he reads the papers he makes in the little book his notes. It is the way in which he would pass his hours in his cabinet of affairs. From time to time he looks watchfully toward the open sea. Again it is an hour, it is two hours, that I wait. The pains of my hollow stomach so torment me that I long to cry out and to roll myself upon the stones. Only my cigarettes sustain my life. I smoke them slowly, that this sustenance may be prolonged. But one by one they vanish into nothing, and the pain of my emptiness ever grows more keen.”

In memory of his anguish, the Lieutenant paused in his narrative and groaned. As for the Captain Gontard, listening to this wildly told story as they went whirling along through the Marseille streets, it seemed to him that he had become a part of a

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tumultuous dream. But he believed that the explanation of it all was to be found in the odor of cognac which emanated from the Lieutenant—more pungently than the odor of sanctity emanates from the blessed saints. His friend's madness, he decided, was merely temporary; and he breathed a sigh of relief as he realized that there was no cause for serious alarm.

They were in the Rue de Noailles, almost at the turning into the Cours Belzunce, as the Lieutenant continued: "Three hours pass. Four hours pass. My cigarettes are exhausted. I am famished. I am desperate. I suffer the most excruciating pangs. My belt is drawn until my waist is that of a wasp. The raft of the *Medusa* is before my eyes. I feel that in another moment I shall swoon. That in two more moments I shall expire. And then it is, in that very instant of my expiring agony, that the felucca comes and the contraband tobacco appears and the fish are inflated—and the wonder of all that I see revives my strength until I am as a tower of iron! Through the next hour it is purely my brave spirit which sustains my fainting body—until all is ended, and I come quickly to land in advance of the huissier, and obtain cognac at the café on the quai. I demand to drink my cognac in a tumbler, and I drain that tumbler twice—each time at a single draught. Then once more am I alive. It is from the café that I come direct to thee.

"And now thou knowest all perfectly and under-

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standest the vengeance that I shall take upon this wretch—whom I have seen in the very midst of his contraband doings, and who before my eyes blew up his fish with wind. Ah, it is in this moment that his fate shall overtake him. We are arrived.”

Actually, as he spoke, the cab stopped in the Cours Belzunce at Madame Marjoulet's shop door. But what his friend had been talking about, and what vengeance was this which he was about to take, the Captain Gontard knew no more than the unborn babes. These incoherent references to spying through a telescope from the battlements of a castle upon inflated fishes and contraband tobacco obviously were the ravings of a disordered mind. All that was clear to him was the incident of the two tumblers of cognac—and two tumblers of cognac taken on an empty stomach at the end of a day of weary watching would account for almost anything out of the common that a man might do or say.

“Speak thou not a word,” said the Lieutenant, his hand on the door-knob. “Leave all to me—that I may crush this base animal in my own way. I am confident that he has come hither. It is the hour of his doom!” And he opened the shop door.

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VI

Having been so much talked about as a possibility, it is not surprising that when the marriage of Monsieur the Lieutenant Lamoureux and Madame the Widow Marjoulet became a reality—and that reality emphasized by the huissier's humiliating exposure and irretrievable disgrace—a wave of emotion surged through the Rue Bausset with the violence of a veritable wave upon a stormy sea. From the Cours Belzunce to the Vieux Port not only was a double row of tongues let loose upon the matter, but each individual tongue was hung in the middle and wagged at both ends. The commotion was supreme.

First of all, because it preceded the marriage, the case of the huissier was discussed with a lively energy.

“To think of it!” exclaimed Madame Gauthier, a clear-starcher of position, speaking to the grocer Monsieur Fromágin. “They say that the tobacco which he had always in his basket, hidden beneath his sham fishes, was a tobacco of Turkey that is worth its weight in gold!”

“It is not worth its weight in gold,” answered Monsieur Fromagin with an air of superior wisdom. “It is the tobacco called ‘Aala’—it is worth ninety francs the kilo. But that, at least, is better than copper.” And he put his hand in his pocket and jingled his sous.

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“Heavens!” cried Madame Gauthier. “Ninety francs the kilo—and the price of a kilo of the best soap is only sixty centimes! It is no wonder that Monsieur Quissard went fishing often, and that he called himself a rich man!”

“And now,” said Monsieur Fromagin, in the tone of moralizing, “he is shut up in prison and has paid a fine of five thousand francs. After all, madame, the honest copper is the best!” And the worthy Fromagin jingled the sous in his pocket with a consciously virtuous air. Indeed, as compared with the stupendous wickedness of the huissier, his own trifling manipulations of sugar and coffee were as nothing at all.

But the marriage of the widow and the Lieutenant was the important matter.

“Monsieur is satisfied, now, that in all that he has spoken of Madame Marjoulet he has uttered calumnies the most cruel. Is it not so?”

It was Madame Vic, standing in the door of her own bakery, who addressed this question to the pharmacien Monsieur Brisson. Madame Vic was arrayed in a seemingly black, which yet, having certain piquant touches of arrangement, was admirably becoming to her large person, and which effectively set off her blooming face. Her white handkerchief of mourning was tied coquettishly in her abundant fair hair. Her carriage and manner betokened the easy contentment of a woman whom the world is using well.

“I am satisfied now,” Monsieur Brisson an-

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swered, "that Madame Marjoulet has played her cards with an excellent skill." And he added, with a bow to Madame Vic that was more courteous than amiable: "When a woman is getting well along in life, and is a widow, it is natural that she should try to make the best market of what remains."

There was bitterness in Monsieur Brisson's words, and still more in his tone. Already he had urged his fitness as a successor to Monsieur Vic in the possession of Madame Vic's heart and bakery—and already his suit had been rejected with a peremptoriness that withered the very roots of hope.

"Monsieur means," Madame Vic answered sweetly, "that it is natural for a sensible widow to refuse to marry the first foolish old dotard who has the assurance to ask her for her hand. Monsieur is quite right."

"But it is not always," continued Monsieur Brisson, ignoring this adroit thrust which so sharply touched him, "that an elderly widow succeeds as Madame Marjoulet has succeeded, in entrapping a handsome young man who also is a rich owner of vines."

"Entrapping, indeed!" snapped Madame Vic. "When we all know that for a year and more he has been sighing his heart out for her, and that it was the merest stroke of good fortune which made his old aunt die just then and leave him the estate upon the Durance. But Monsieur always was of

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the opinion that she should marry the huissier—who now, because of his tobacco-smuggling, is in jail. That would have been for her a fine marriage! No doubt he would have fed her upon those famous fish made of air—that the Lieutenant saw him take from his pocket and inflate one by one and place in his basket to hide the tobacco that he got from the ship; and that the Lieutenant forced him to hold out at arm's-length while he ran them through with his sword before Madame Marjoulet's eyes. Ah, truly, the marriage with the huissier would have been excellent! I compliment Monsieur upon his astuteness. All the advice that he has to give about matrimony is valuable above pearls!" And Madame Vic laughed a very scornful laugh.

This was another thrust under Monsieur Brisson's guard, and a keen one. The pharmacien winced.

"What I have to say," he answered hotly, "is that Madame Marjoulet has calculated with a coldness all her chances from the beginning, and so has made for herself a very good market indeed. But it does not follow, Madame, that you—who are a much older and a very much plainer woman—can do as well!"

This was mere brutality. Being overmatched with the rapier, Monsieur Brisson had taken to the club.

"And I say," rejoined Madame Vic, her eyes snapping and her face flaming with a just anger,

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"that you, Monsieur, are the meanest and most despicable of creatures; and that Madame Marjoulet, without a thought of calculation, has married, as every woman should marry, for pure and disinterested love!"

Again the case had not been fairly stated; and again it was the philosophic Monsieur Petot, taking a safe place midway between these violent extremes, who arrived at what substantially was the truth.

"When a woman marries," asked Monsieur Petot, as he adjusted the apron upon the person of Monsieur Peloux, "what better can she desire than affection?"

"Of the desirable attributes of marriage," answered the notary decidedly, "it is among the best."

"And when a woman marries," continued Monsieur Petot, as he mixed the lather in the cup, "what better can a woman desire than a good fortune that will safeguard her against many troubles and cares?"

"That also is of the best," the notary answered in a still more assured tone.

"And finding both affection and a fortune united in one and the same man," Monsieur Petot went on, uplifting the brush well filled with lather, "what better can a woman do than marry that man?"

"It is impossible that a woman should do better than that," replied the notary.

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“Precisely,” concluded the barber. “And therefore that is what Madame Marjoulet has done !”

And he applied the lather to the face of Monsieur Peloux.

“LE BON ONCLE D’AMÉRIQUE”



“LE BON ONCLE D’AMÉRIQUE”

WE had come sailing down through a long and very perfect dinner in Langley’s studio — Mrs. Langley had a genius for studio dinners : she never was known to give one that went wrong—and so had reached happily the latitude of cognac and the longitude of the demitasse. It is the stage of a dinner which begets a genial flow of all the kindest humors of the human body ; which inspires the human soul with an affectionate faith in souls in general ; which, in a word, creating a noble scorn of half-confidences, tends to open in the frankest manner the mellowed human heart. Langley was leaning back comfortably in the big cushioned chair with which he had replaced the stiff-backed structure at the foot of the table ; he was alternating his sips of coffee and of cognac with an exquisite satisfaction ; he was smoking with a dainty pleasure one of his own peculiar *puritos* of Tepic, whereof the source of supply was known to himself alone. Finally, we had been talking about Paris and our youthful years.

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Under these softening conditions it was that he dropped into the following bit of autobiographical reminiscence in the most natural way in the world.

I

Those were the days when I was working with Carolus. It was honest hard work that most of us did in that atelier. Whoever tried shirking found himself suddenly on the wrong side of the door. “Messieurs,” Carolus would say on those edifying and highly volcanic occasions, “it is supposed that you come here with the serious purpose. If you desire only to play, you must go elsewhere !” And then the just would suffer with the unjust—for after an expulsion we used to get criticisms all around which made us wish we that had died in infancy, or had been bred bricklayers, or had done anything under heaven but make consummate asses of ourselves by going in for art.

It was because we really were working hard, I suppose, that we got so much out of the fun that we had in between whiles. It rarely was high-priced fun, for very few of us had any money worth speaking of: only the theatre now and then and a little supper following; or a run out into the country, with a walk in the woods and a breakfast somewhere; or a jaunt down the river to one or another of the little towns where Paris makes

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merry of a Sunday—nothing much in any of it : but we did have good times !

Tartigny and Ploiron and I always hung together in these small frolics ; and as a general thing—that we might not miss the refining influence of the gentler sex—we usually took along with us Toinette and Margot and Thérèse. Toinette had just then got her first regular engagement at the Variétés. Her part was not a leading one. She opened a door and courtesied. That was the whole of it. But we organized a claque for her, and gave her such a send-off that she got a speaking part the next season and made a hit in it ; and two years later she moved on to the Palais Royal and became a celebrity. Toinette was an exceedingly spirited young person. At times, indeed, she was almost too spirited : as that day at Aigremont when she insisted upon dancing down the whole length of the long table at which the ordinary was served—and we had to pay for the broken china and glass !

The other two were models. Thérèse was a round little Bordelaise, with prodigiously fine black eyes and an inordinate fondness for truffles. Margot was a blond Provençale—tall, stately, magnificent—the most nobly beautiful creature I ever saw. But for all her stateliness Margot did not hesitate, on occasion, to override with a charming impulsiveness any of the conventions of polite society which happened to get in her way : as, for example, when she and Thérèse, sitting on top

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of the omnibus after luncheon—we had chartered an omnibus and had gone out *en prince* to the Grand Prix—calmly took down their hair, and then did it up again (with the lid of the chafing-dish for a mirror) in the sight of all the world.

That expedition to Longchamps in a chartered omnibus was just after my quarterly allowance came in. I always was expected to do something handsome at those auriferous seasons, and I always did. Indeed, my receipt of a quarterly allowance was regarded by all of them as nothing short of a quarterly miracle. I got it, usually, about the twentieth of the month, and Ploiron and Tartigny always used to go over with me to Hottinguer’s to help me draw it. They said that going with me made them feel as though they had a quarterly allowance too. As for me, because of my twelve hundred dollars a year, they called me the nabob. To be sure, it sounded better when spoken of as six thousand francs.

II

It was from my uncle, Mr. Logan Rittenhouse of Philadelphia, that my allowance came. He was the dearest old boy, the kindest, the warmest hearted, that ever lived. His one weakness was that he went in as a patron of art. Heaven bless him, he knew no more about art than he did about the precession of the equinoxes! But he had

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bought a rattling string of capital pictures, and he had learned to talk about them quite appropriately. From the time that I was a boy he always was good to me. Even if he had not been a patron of art, and so in a way bound to live up to his pose, I am sure that he would have chalked my hat all the same while I studied with Carolus—just as he chalked it while I was at school and at college, and always sent me rousing tips at Christmas besides.

As to Aunt Maria, his wife, all that she ever gave me was good advice. Aunt Maria was a striking type of one sort of old-fashioned Philadelphia gentlewoman. Solid respectability was her hold. She had enough deportment to fit out a dozen New York women, and she was propriety itself. She was on the boards of direction of all sorts of well-meaning societies; she used to walk Uncle Rittenhouse off to Saint Peter’s every Sunday morning—and she could talk more dull stupidities in half an hour than any woman outside of Philadelphia could talk in half a year.

I made it a rule always to drink Uncle Rittenhouse’s health formally on quarter day. Tartigny and Ploiron and the girls were accustomed to join in this ceremony with effusion. “Au bon oncle d’Amérique!” they would cry as we all together raised our glasses—and then they would drink their congratulations to me upon having such an uncle, and would express their very genuine sorrow because heaven had not blessed each of them with an uncle of the same sort. Indeed, they came in

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time to feel that they almost had a part ownership in him, and their affection for him was scarcely less than mine. They urged me constantly to invite him to come to Paris to live. They did not know, you see, about Aunt Maria. I kept her—decorous family skeleton that she was—in the closet where she belonged. “Who knows?” Tartigny and Ploiron would exclaim in chorus. “We are orphans—the good uncle may take a fancy to adopt us! At the least, he will buy our pictures. He will make us rich! We also shall be nabobs! Figure to yourself how we would appear as nabobs! We each of us would possess more than one coat. We would have at least three pairs of trousers apiece—also new hats and shiny shoes! We would smoke cigars of the Havana! We would go to Honfleur for a week!”

Though I did not uproot the hopes of these sanguine young men by saying so, I knew very well that my uncle never would make Paris his home. But that he might come over for a visit was not at all impossible; and in all my letters I urged him in the strongest terms to come. To my entreaties on the score of affection I always added such enticing facts about the Paris restaurants as would be certain to stir his Philadelphia nature to its deepest depths.

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III

At last, toward the end of my third year in Paris, a letter came from Uncle Rittenhouse telling that he and Aunt Maria really were coming over for a couple of months. A full fortnight, he wrote, would be given to Paris—and I must make up a programme that would enable him to eat everything that there was to be eaten and to see everything that there was to be seen.

This letter came to me at a happy time: the very day after I had been notified that my little picture for the Salon—it was a very little picture—had got in. My joy, to be sure, was dampened by the fact that Tartigny’s and Ploiron’s pictures had been rejected. But then they had nobody to blame for their failure but themselves. Tartigny had set the pace, and Ploiron had followed it. “For a young man who would impress upon the world his genius,” said Tartigny, “the thing is to strike high—to paint a picture so big that it projects itself upon the public with a bound! That is what I have done in my ‘Les adieux d’Hector.’ It will fill a whole panel. It will be the one thing in the room where it is hung that everybody *must* see!”

“And that is what I have done,” said Ploiron, “in my ‘Lever de lune aux Batignolles.’ That also will fill a whole panel. That also will take the world by storm!”

And so they nearly ruined themselves—and got

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me into a hole by borrowing every son that I could lend them—by painting half-acre pictures that only a jury of blind men ever would have passed.

But they took their rejection with high hearts. “Ah,” said Tartigny, “it is the natural jealousy of the older men that has destroyed us. Never mind! All will go well in the end! Pictures like these have only to be seen by rich connoisseurs to be sold. Then we shall have our revenge! Some nabob who loves art—for example, your uncle, Edouard—will come to our studios and will see these great works. In five minutes all will be settled. The nabobs will embrace us and pour congratulations upon us. Then they will seat themselves at tables and write cheques in five figures that will set our brains in a whirl. After that we shall paint only orders and shall have our niches in the Temple of Fame!”

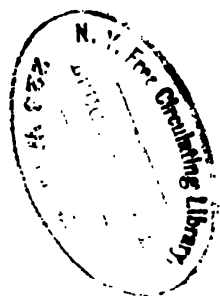
“And your ‘Les adieux d’Hector’ and my ‘Lever de lune aux Batignolles’ will leave this ungrateful France,” Ploiron added, “and will be the evangels in America of the glorious new school of French art!”

Of course, since they took it that way, I had nothing to say.

It was on a Sunday morning that my uncle’s letter came—just as we were setting off for Aigremont to the breakfast that I was to give to celebrate my success. The girls took some laurel along and crowned me; Tartigny and Ploiron made handsome speeches about me—which were all the hand-



“AU SALUT DU BON ONCLE D'AMERIQUE !”



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somer because their own pictures had been fired ; they all drank to me ; and then we all embraced. When these pleasing ceremonies were ended I brought out Uncle Rittenhouse's letter and told the good news. Upon hearing it the enthusiasm of my friends was without bounds.

“We will take him everywhere !” cried Tartigny.

“We will entertain him like a prince !” cried Ploiron.

“It shall be all the theatres in succession, and a supper after every one !” cried Toinette.

“It shall be breakfasts at Barbizon, and walks in the woods, and dinners !” cried Margot.

“It shall be the excursion to Honfleur !” cried Thérèse.

There was no need to check in its first generous outburst this fine flow of enthusiasm. I refrained from adding—it was a painful disclosure that as well could be made later—that Aunt Maria was coming too.

Yet I regretted keenly, as the days went by and the possible joys incident to the coming of the good uncle were increased prodigiously by every sort of ingenious suggestion, that I had not made a clean breast of the whole matter at the start. By the middle of June they were talking confidently of an expedition of a fortnight in Normandy, followed by a run through Switzerland, and ending in a stay at Hombourg of a month !

“It will be so amusing to the good uncle to make such a journey in our company !” said Toinette.

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“So interesting !” said Margot.

“So instructive !” said Thérèse.

“And he will order pictures from us right and left all the way !” cried Tartigny and Ploiron together ; and added : “Au salut du bon oncle d’Amérique !”

We drank this toast standing, and with cheers !

For the life of me, while this sort of thing was going on, I could not help feeling like an imperfectly whited sepulchre. Awake, I was the victim of horrible visions. Asleep, nightmares rode me to despair. The motive of my visions and of my nightmares always was the same : Aunt Maria—staid, precise, decorous, radiating Deportment in every direction—in some utterly appalling combination with Toinette or Margot or Thérèse ! I was full of remorse for my unwise reticence at the beginning ; but I maintained my misleading silence because of my dread of the storm that I knew must burst upon me when I told all.

IV

Toward the end of June came another letter from Uncle Rittenhouse. He wrote from London : where they were resting, he said, after a beastly voyage. He declared that London was an over-rated city, and especially in the matter of food. The food was execrable. As soon as his liver got in working order again he was coming straight to

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Paris—where he knew that he could get something to eat.

My uncle directed me to secure rooms for him at the Splendide (the Splendide was in its glory in those days) and to get him the best they had. I knew, he wrote, that he didn't go in for that sort of thing ; but I also knew that my aunt did—and so I must get him absolutely the best they had. He added, in his hearty way, that the apartment must include a room for myself—as I ought to know without being told. And he ended by saying that some payment of earnest-money had better be made to secure the rooms positively, and that he therefore enclosed a draft for a thousand francs.

That evening there was a general treading on air when the impending great event was discussed by my warm-hearted friends. "Figure to yourself," exclaimed Toinette, "our Edouard living *au premier* at the Splendide ! Figure to yourself his being free to order from the restaurant and from the cellar what he pleases—and the good uncle standing ready, with his hands in his deep pockets, to pay the bill ! It is a dream !"

"And oh ! the boxes at the theatres and the suppers !" cried Margot rapturously.

"And the drives in the Bois ! And the dinners !" cried Thérèse. "We will go to the Café Madrid for the dinners. They are heavenly ! Superb !"

"He will buy my 'Les adieux d'Hector !' " cried Tartigny.

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“My ‘Lever de lune aux Batignolles’ already may be considered sold !” cried Ploiron.

And then the whole five of them shouted together: “To the health of the good American uncle! To the health of our Edouard who brings him to our arms !”

As they drank this toast they crowded around me and embraced me. And I solemnly declare that at that very moment I saw Aunt Maria standing before me as clearly and as substantially as ever I saw her in the flesh ! She was dressed in her normal dull black silk ; she wore her normal white lace cap with dangling bobs ; her Deportment lit her up like a halo ; her expression was Propriety itself !

I shuddered. Cold sweat started out upon my forehead. For a moment I was dizzy and faint. When I grew steady again the vision had vanished. After that I had no heart to continue the festivities. On the plea of sudden indisposition—which my ghastly paleness confirmed—I hastened from the room. Outside the door I had a moment of courage in which I turned back to tell my friends everything. But as my hand touched the door-knob fear once more overcame me. Within, I heard their light-hearted laughter. There was a choking in my throat, a stifling in my chest, a general sense of suffocation. I simply could not do it. With a sigh of bitter agony I turned away : leaving them still in the fools’ paradise that so weakly I had permitted them to enter—though all

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the while I knew that Nemesis was coming in a dull black silk frock and in a white lace cap with dangling bobs !

V

In accordance with my uncle's instructions, I engaged for him the most magnificent apartment obtainable at the Splendide. When I went upon this mission Tartigny and Ploiron went with me : they wished to share, they said, in the homage that would be done to the person who engaged such a suite of rooms. They were right about the homage. Had I wanted to, I am convinced that the gérant would have been more than willing to let me kick him up stairs and then kick him down again. In fact, the creature's servility so disgusted me that I made Tartigny and Ploiron do most of the bargaining. They liked it. The gérant, evidently, drew the quite natural conclusion that the uncle in whose interest we were acting was the uncle of all of us.

The apartment that we ultimately engaged was fit for the Emperor. Indeed, it was furnished quite in his taste. The hangings were of crimson velvet ; crimson velvet covered the furniture ; crimson predominated in the violent frescoping and in the uncontrolled carpets ; everything that possibly could be gilded fairly blazed with gold. The cabins of the Old Colony steamboats in the days of Jim

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Fiske were the only places comparable with that apartment that ever I have seen designed for the habitation of man. In the middle of the great salon was a pyramidal piece of furniture that might have come from a Sound steamboat bodily—a circular sofa, the centre-piece of which rose to a height of four feet or thereabouts and upheld a hideous bronze vase filled with artificial flowers. It was one of the most hopelessly vulgar objects that can be imagined—and it was absolutely in keeping with the Imperial vulgarity dominant in Paris at that particular time.

The price that the Splendide people asked for this explosive suite of rooms was something terrific. It was so much, and the rooms were so offensively blatant, that I hesitated about making a positive engagement. Tartigny and Ploiron thought the apartment charming. This was not so much because their artistic taste was at fault as that their imagination was dazzled. They believed that a thing that cost so much necessarily must be magnificent. Swayed by this feeling, they insisted that I should engage the apartment at once. Never mind the price, they said airily. What you get is for the good uncle: for him it is impossible that anything can be too fine. And, you see, our reputation for hospitality is at stake. He must feel that we have taken pains to please him. We must make him comfortable at any cost. Thus urged, I paid down five hundred francs as earnest-money and engaged the rooms.

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The lively anticipations of coming joys to which my friends gave vent as we walked away together from the Splendide made me inexpressibly miserable. My heart smote me as I thought upon the dreary feast of Dead Sea apples to which I was inviting—tacitly, at least—these warm-hearted young men. I yearned over them. I longed to throw myself upon their generous breasts, to implore their mercy, and to confess all. My courage not being equal to that exalted line of conduct, their companionship became unendurable. Excusing myself on the ground that I must write to my uncle to inform him that all was in readiness for his arrival, I turned from them and fled.

When I had left them, and had grown a little calmer, my mind was beset by doubts as to the manner in which I had discharged my stewardship. I had, to be sure, obeyed my instructions to the letter; and I was confident that my aunt—whose parsimony was equalled only by her extravagance—openly would decry and secretly would delight in the quarters which I had engaged. But with my uncle the case was different. He was a sensible man, with a great love of solid comfort and a great hatred of vain display. I knew that he would accept without a word of fault-finding the choice that I had made for him; but I feared that in his heart of hearts he would regret that I had housed him in the midst of that atrocious pyrotechnic display.

Moved by these considerations, I returned to the Splendide and arranged that on the day of his ar-

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rival a second apartment—also *au premier*, but somewhat less expensive and decidedly less aggressive than the first—should be held in readiness, and that he should be permitted to take the one that he preferred. I decided, however, not to say anything to my uncle about this subsidiary arrangement until he had seen the more magnificent suite of rooms. All that I wanted was to be ready for him, in case his manner indicated dissatisfaction, with a good second choice. When I had settled the matter in this way I was much easier in my mind.

VI

At the atelier, that afternoon, Tartigny and Ploiron were so overflowing with joyful excitement that I became fairly desperate. We would have a preliminary celebration, they declared, that very evening: a dinner all together at which we would drink to the good uncle's safe arrival, and at which we still farther would perfect our arrangements for giving him a fitting welcome when he came. A matter of such importance, they added, could not be talked over too often or too much.

This simply was horrible. The thought that the same sort of thing certainly would be going on during the whole of the ensuing week was more than I could stand. I managed to get away from the atelier alone, and went miserably on a solitary walk along the quays. That Tartigny and Ploiron

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would come for me to my rooms, and would drag me off to the celebrative dinner if they found me there, I knew was inevitable. Escape seemed hopeless. Involuntarily, my eyes turned toward the Seine ! In this despairing moment I was saved by an inspiration. Temporary flight was a possibility, and was preferable to permanent death : I would go into hiding until my uncle arrived. With his arrival I would be safe. However disastrous in other ways might be the coming of Aunt Maria, at least her presence would protect me effectually against the righteous resentment of my cruelly deluded friends. Strengthened by this gleam of hope, I returned to my lodgings instantly ; wrote a hurried note to Tartigny explaining that my uncle had telegraphed me to join him in London for the few remaining days of his sojourn there ; packed hastily my portmanteau ; jumped into a cab—and bade the cabman drive across the river, and drive fast !

Not until the man asked to what address he should take me did I realize that I had no definite destination. I reflected for a moment, and then told him to drive to the Rue Cambon. That was a long way off ; and in the Rue Cambon was a little hotel frequented only by Americans and English. There could not be a better place in which to secrete myself. I would be hidden there as effectually as though I had gone to the moon. I am confident, however, that everybody in that hotel believed me to be the American forger who was known to be

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just then in hiding in Paris. While daylight lasted I did not venture outside of my room. At night I took feverish walks in the tangle of little streets between the Boulevard Malesherbes and the Rue St. Honoré. To reach this sequestered region I had to cross the Rue Royale. I crossed it as though pursued by fiends!

At last came the evening fixed for my uncle's arrival. I paid my bill and went off to meet him at the Gare du Nord. On my way I left my bag at the Splendide. There was no need for me to enter the hotel. That morning I had written to the gérant repeating my instructions to have both apartments in readiness. I gave my bag to a porter and drove on to the railway station. I was possessed by a torturing dread that Tartigny and Ploiron would come to the railway station too. They had proposed this demonstration of welcome, and I had decidedly vetoed it; yet I was painfully far from being certain that they would not carry their project into effect. There was no telling, indeed, to what lengths their impulsive natures might carry them. If they happened to think of it, they were quite capable of bringing along the girls! I entered the station shuddering, and with extreme caution. If they were there, the only course open to me was instant flight. Infinitely to my relief, they were not there.

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VII

The train came in on time. My uncle and my aunt descended from a first-class compartment. My aunt's elderly maid descended from the adjoining second-class compartment. Three porters seized upon their three bags, the hat-box, the umbrellas, and a roll of rugs. My uncle's little sole-leather trunk, my aunt's two Saratoga trunks, the maid's box, were extracted from the luggage-van and despatched to the examining-room. The word was passed joyfully among the railway attendants that Americans were in sight. The procession moved.

My uncle was all heartiness and cordiality. “You are looking pale and tired, my boy,” he said. “You have been working too hard. Well, never mind—now you are to have a fortnight's holiday.”

My aunt's cordiality was of the temperate sort that was habitual with her. “I am glad to see you, Edward,” she said. “You certainly do not look well. I fear that you have been keeping late hours.”

I steered them through the examination of their luggage, stowed them and their belongings in and on the omnibus that I had in waiting, and we drove off to the hotel. As we went along my uncle told me about the deplorable food that he had been compelled to eat in London. He declared that the irascibility of the English as a race no longer occasioned him surprise.

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The *gérant* was in waiting for us at the foot of the grand stairway of the Splendide. As my uncle—tall, stout, jovial—descended from the omnibus this official greeted him with much obsequiousness, yet with an oddly knowing smile. But when my aunt appeared followed by her maid—a most grimly respectable person—the *gérant*’s face of a sudden became curiously grave, and his expression betokened unmixed surprise. He hesitated; seemed about to speak; hesitated again; then slightly shrugged his shoulders and merely bowed.

Grouped behind the *gérant*, at the foot of the brilliantly lighted stairway, was a detachment of footmen. The display was imposing. Royalty could not have been more magnificently received. There was not enough hand-luggage to go round among these magnificent creatures. Two of the more enterprising of them got a bag and a coat apiece. A few more got single pieces. The remainder continued to bow. As they performed these arduous services their faces were wreathed with expectant smiles.

The *gérant*, still with his odd look of surprise, led the way. I followed with my aunt upon my arm. A step behind us came my uncle. Two steps behind my uncle came the grim maid. The train of footmen brought up the rear. In this stately order we swept up the stairway, along the broad hall, and so into the antechamber of the crimson-and-gold apartment that I had engaged.

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The great doors leading into the salon were closed. To my amazement a most unmistakable sound of suppressed laughter came from within.

Again the gérant paused, half turned toward me with a look of wondering inquiry, again shrugged his shoulders—and then with a sort of desperate energy flung wide open the double door. A flood of light burst upon us from the blazing chandeliers; there was a shout of laughter, and a cry in chorus (in French, fortunately): “To the health of the good—” And then there was a frozen silence as chill as the chill of death!

If I live to be a thousand years old I still shall feel a sickening thrill in the very marrow of my bones as I recall that moment of intense agony. In my time I have seen horrible sights—but never anything that to me was as horrible as what I saw then!

On the pyramidal centre of that vile circular sofa, replacing the bronze vase filled with artificial flowers, stood Margot. She wore a liberty-cap and was sparingly—very sparingly—draped in the French flag. Below her, standing on the seat of the sofa, with their right and left arms respectively clasped about her waist, were Toinette and Thérèse. Their drapery—of a like parsimony—was classic white. At Toinette's feet lay a palette and brushes, together with an open paint-box. At the feet of Thérèse lay modelling tools, chisels, a wooden mallet, along with a cast in plaster of the head of the Young Augustus. To the right and left of these

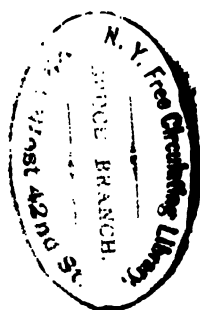
“LE BON ONCLE D'AMÉRIQUE”

principal figures, reclining partly upon the floor and partly against the sofa, were Tartigny and Ploiron. Tartigny was clad in a French infantry uniform and held in his left hand a bunch of thunderbolts—improvised from long-handled brushes to which had been glued gilt pasteboard barbs. Ploiron, in white drapery highly suggestive of a sheet, held in his right hand an olive branch—that had been made from a mahl-stick and wisps of green tissue-paper and twisted wire. Each member of this interesting group—it really was admirably composed—held outstretched toward us a brimming glass : with the obvious intention of drinking the toast of which we had heard only the opening words. Sweeping downward in a long flowing curve from Margot's extended right hand was a scroll, blazoned in red-white-and-blue letters—luckily, the scroll had curled up in such a way as to hide the last word—that supplied the key to this stirring tableau vivant: “France, supported by the Liberal Arts of Painting and Sculpture, and dominating War and Peace, extends her welcome to America!”

The ghastly silence that fell upon us in the midst of that interrupted toast lasted, as it seemed to me, through countless ages. I felt my aunt's arm tremble as it rested upon mine, and then grow rigid. She gave a low gasp. My uncle was too far gone for gasping. He did not utter a sound. As for the members of the tableau vivant, had they been of marble they could not have been more still.



“‘TO THE HEALTH OF THE GOOD—’”



“LE BON ONCLE D'AMÉRIQUE”

Never did the Gorgon's Head get in a better or a quicker bit of petrifying than was got in on that occasion by my intensely proper aunt!

VIII

In tremendous emergencies even commonplace people sometimes grow heroic and become inspired. My own heroism and inspiration, under stress of a combination of circumstances that was nothing less than appalling, admirably illustrates this interesting psychological fact. In that agonizing instant of waiting—it could not have been more—I rallied my mental forces and matured a plan of deliverance. In the self-same instant I put my plan into execution. Holding my aunt's arm firmly within mine, I turned briskly from the door and dragged her with me. This operation forced back my uncle and the maid. The *gérant* had the rare presence of mind to bang to the doors. As he stepped back I turned upon him fiercely and addressed him in tones of righteous wrath.

“What do you mean by this outrageous blunder?” I demanded sternly. “Did you not tell me but yesterday that this apartment had been engaged by Prince Potowsky? Take us instantly to the apartment that you showed me and that I secured a week ago!”

I spoke in English, for I wished my aunt and my uncle to have the benefit of my explanation. The

“LE BON ONCLE D’AMÉRIQUE”

gérant understood English—and he also had begun to understand the situation. He perceived that it was likely to lead to the immediate departure from the hotel of a promisingly profitable patron ; that it might even develop into a public scandal by which the custom of Americans generally would be lost. And on top of all this he had the cold comfort of knowing that he himself, in the main, was responsible for the catastrophe that had occurred : in that, being misled by the prominent part taken by Tartiguy and Ploiron in hiring the apartment, he had permitted them and their spirited companions to take possession of it in advance of my arrival. His shoes, clearly, were narrower even than mine : and therefore it was with an expression of mingled relief and gratitude that he realized the masterly import of my words. Later, he expressed his thanks to me in formal terms. My action in the premises, he declared, had been nothing less than sublime ! He took his cue on the instant.

“A thousand pardons, m’sieu — madame,” he cried. “I have made a most stupid mistake in bringing you to Prince Potowsky’s apartment. The apartment on the other side of the hall is yours. I myself had the honor to set it in order for you but to-day.”

Neither my aunt nor my uncle was in any condition to speak. They were utterly bewildered. With an admirable coolness the gérant sent downstairs for the key which he had at that moment in his own pocket—and so was able to shoot four men

“LE BON ONCLE D’AMÉRIQUE”

ahead to light the candles. This flank movement was a complete success. In three minutes we were ushered into the other apartment—that so obviously had been set in order freshly for expected guests as to leave no room for doubting that it really was the one that I had engaged.

My aunt sank down into a chair. My uncle laid his hat upon a table with a chuckle, and as he took off his overcoat he fairly broke into a laugh.

“Edward!” demanded my aunt severely. “Are you sure that this is a respectable hotel?”

“It is the most fashionable hotel in Paris, Aunt,” I replied with a considerate exactness; and hurried to add: “I regret exceedingly that this most inexcusable mistake has been made. But you must remember that the apartment in which we accidentally saw those very indecorous young people belongs to a Russian prince; and you also must remember that you are—in France!”

“Oh!” said my aunt.

My uncle continued to chuckle. “So we are! So we are!” he said feelingly. “I should know that those girls were French if I met them in the moon! Prince Powwowsky seems to make a point of picking out good-looking people for his friends—eh Edward? I do wonder what they were up to, all in that queer heap? Did you notice the top one? The one in the little red cap who seemed to have dressed in a hurry in a rather under-sized flag? Now she—”

“Logan!”

“LE BON ONCLE D'AMÉRIQUE”

It was Aunt Maria who spoke, and her tone was icily cold.

“Logan !” she repeated. “If you cannot respect yourself, at least respect *me* ! Never let me hear from you another word about those brazen French hussies again !”

When Aunt Maria spoke like that Uncle Rittenhouse knew that she was not to be trifled with.

“Well, well,” he answered, “it *was* funny ; but since you don’t quite seem to see the funny side of it, my dear, I’ll hold my tongue. And now let us have dinner as quickly as possible. Whatever may be wrong with French customs, at least there’s nothing wrong with French cooks !”

IX

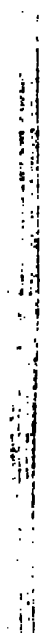
After all, it was Tartigny and Ploiron who paid the penalty of my ill-advised reticence and of their own indiscretion. They themselves perceived that after what had occurred their presentation to my uncle was out of the question. Poor fellows ! They never tasted the dinners and the suppers upon which they had counted so confidently—and “Les adieux d’Hector” and the “Lever de lune aux Batignolles” remained unsold ! They never quite forgave me for what they termed my duplicity about Aunt Maria—and I don’t wonder, I’m sure !

As for Uncle Rittenhouse, his adventure in the

“LE BON ONCLE D'AMÉRIQUE”

apartment of Prince Powwowsky—as he always called him—remained his best stock story to his dying day. Unless I am much mistaken, Aunt Maria used to tell that story sometimes, too.

THE END



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